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BERTHA, THE BEAUTY.

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RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

Dedicated

TO D. W. BAGLEY, Esq.,
OF WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA,

BY

The Author.

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA,
August 16, 1871.



BERTHA THE BEAUTY:

A

STORY OF THE SOUTHERN REVOLUTION.

BY

SARAH J. C. WHITTLESEY, &

AUTHOR OF "HEART-DROPS FROM MEMORY'S URN;" "THE STRANGER'S STRATAGEM;"
"HERBERT HAMILTON; OR, THE BAS BLEU," ETC.

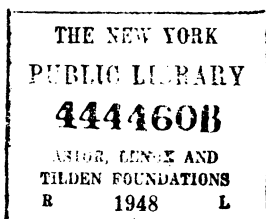
It was a very proper answer to him who asked, why any man should be delighted with Beauty? that it was a question that none but a blind man could ask; since any beautiful object doth so much attract the sight of all men, that it is in no man's power not to be pleased with it.—*Clarendon*.



PHILADELPHIA:
CLAXTON, REMSEN & HAFFELFINGER,
Nos. 819 & 821 MARKET STREET.

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BERTHA, THE BEAUTY.

CHAPTER I.

BERTHA'S FATHER.

IT was a low brown house, with a long piazza hung with golden jessamines flooding the blue air with fragrance in early spring; and roses, and violets, and asters, and chrysanthemums blooming about it all the year round, excepting the bleak, blossom-blighting months of winter.

There were crimson-fringed maples, and vine-covered poplars, and broad-leaved sycamores, and acorn-filled oaks, towering above the low brown house with the long piazza; crowning it with shadows of purple, and pouring cool breezes into the low wide windows, through all the long sultry days of faint-hearted summer; and dropping their golden and crimson leaves and rattling acorns on the moss-covered shingles, in the sober and sweetly pensive days of autumn.

Set down in a wide green yard, with a wider and greener garden behind it, was the low brown house with the long piazza, with the deep breezy woodlands belting it like an emerald ring on a background of blue.

Hard by the low brown house with the long piazza was the little brown church, with its plain pine benches and old-fashioned pulpit, all guiltless of paint and odorous of new timber; with small wooden boxes filled with swamp

sand, dotting the clean floor of the country sanctuary, for the accommodation of tobacco-chewers and benefit of the sexton — which functionary was the Rev. Dr. Williams, who was mainly instrumental in the erection of the little brown church, and from whom, in consequence, it derived its distinguishing title—WILLIAMS'S CHAPEL.

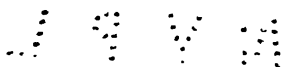
And here was our heroine christened—little golden-haired, waxen-faced, brown-eyed Bertha Belmont. Like most heroines, Bertha was a beauty, and poor; but unlike them, in general, she was not an orphan. Her father was a Connecticut Yankee, who had wandered away from his native State (a genuine Yankee characteristic) with a fair young bride, to North Carolina, and married the mother of our heroine, after the death of his first wife. Two sons were born of the first union; a girl and boy of the second.

Mr. Belmont bore the reputation of being "easy as an old shoe;" his bump of self-esteem was painfully low. He had no ambition beyond threadbare breeches and a well-filled pipe. Six years after the birth of his daughter, Mr. Belmont left the pleasant town of Williamsville, on the river Roanoke, where she first opened her brown eyes to the sunshine and blue skies, and settled down in the low brown house with the long piazza, twenty-one miles from the place of her birth, in the dark wild woods.

Born and reared in town, admired by the beaux, and envied by the belles, in the highest circles of society, Mrs. Belmont half died of *ennui*, eleven mortal years, in the dark, lonely woods of her native Carolina.

Mr. Belmont's abolition sentiments militated against his interest in the Southland. They said he sought to apply the match of Yankee officiousness to the magazine of their Southern institution; but proof was wanting to convict him of the crime, and he lived unmolested, an object of suspicion.

Mr. Belmont would have been wholly neglected by his neighbors, but for his college education acquired at old



Yale, which often rendered him necessary to those far his superior in wealth. If there was a lawsuit pending, Mr. Belmont's advice must be had; if there was a difficulty among the rustics, Mr. Belmont must arbitrate it; if there was a shower of electricity resembling falling stars, Mr. Belmont must be aroused at midnight to pacify the panic-stricken; if the sun was unusually eclipsed, Mr. Belmont must account for the phenomenon on philosophical principles. And so Mr. Belmont was a man of importance among the aristocracy and democracy, for miles around, notwithstanding his anti-slavery principles, and the suspicion with which he was regarded.

Whether Mr. Belmont's abolition sentiments were ever expressed to the prejudice of masters or not, they certainly were detrimental to his own pecuniary circumstances; for his great sympathy for those in bondage kept his purse in the last stage of consumption—lean as Pharaoh's kine; and the low brown house with the long piazza remained in an unfinished state eleven long, poverty-pinched years. The walls were unplastered, and the wainscot unpainted; and the means requisite to complete the work went from Mr. Belmont's benevolent pocket to fill black mouths with tobacco and rum, supposed to be for a more charitable purpose. Mr. Belmont could not say *No!* to a twig from an Ethiopian tree; and his credulity was astonishing.

His farm of thirty acres was poorly cultivated, for he was too tender of Africa to enforce obedience to his commands; while his children and pupils were well thrashed for any dereliction in duty. His goods were sold on trust to ebony customers, who never returned an equivalent, and who stole from him at night what they had not purchased "on tick" in the day. But Mr. Belmont pitied the unfortunate race, and entered no complaint; but suffered them to go scot-free. Mr. Belmont failed many times, as a merchant, solely through sympathy for the ignorant

and *oppressed* sons of Ham ; while the inmates of the low brown house with the long piazza walked the ways of humble life, through lack of the scattered and stolen means that would have elevated them to their rightful position in refined Southern society.

But Mr. Belmont was a man of sterling integrity and inflexible probity, and his greatest weakness was that which kept him poor, and his family in the vale of obscurity. Mr. Belmont was not adapted, mentally, to the latitude in which he had located ; and his family were the greatest sufferers, through his mistake in emigrating from free soil, overalls, and hay-ricks. He was his children's teacher ; and not till she had attained the age of fourteen did Bertha receive instruction from another.

Our heroine had no childhood. She was a quiet, solemn, isolated thing from earliest youth, who read stolen romances at midnight when her parents were asleep, and dreamed, in the purple, breezy woods, at noonday and twilight, of the great gay world afar off, of which she had read. Bertha Belmont was a timid, taciturn, and visionary child.

CHAPTER II.

BERTHA'S FRIENDS.

HA, ha ! — he, he !”

“What's the matter, Min ?”

“Ha, ha ! — he, he ! — Mr. Belmont's bought a nigger !”

“I don't believe it !”

“True as you're alive ! — I saw it done !”

“Well, that shows ! Thought it was against his principles.”

"So 't is; he did it to oblige the darky. You know Mr. Wallace is about to move to Tennessee, to join his wife's father, and the woman don't want to go; so, to accommodate her, Mr. Belmont has become her purchaser, through his wife. He handed the money over to madam, and shakes his skirts clean of the great sin of slavery—ha, ha!—he, he!"

"He'd better have kept the money to finish his house."

"So, so; but then the poor thing would have to go to Tennessee against her will."

"T would n't hurt her much, for she has n't a relative in all this section, and she's rather old to have formed a romantic attachment."

"Ha, ha!—he, he!—makes no difference—she don't want to go, and that's enough for Mr. Belmont—he, he!"

"Hush, you rattlebox! Well, I hope his poor wife won't have to burn her brown eyes out over the kitchen fire any longer. It's a shame how that woman does slave from morning till night, when her husband's education is sufficient to keep them up in the world as high as the wealthiest, if he had the ambition and self-respect of a Southerner. Mrs. Belmont was the envy and admiration of the circle in which she moved, before her marriage, they say; not rich, but the adopted daughter of an aristocrat, and might have done better than become a household and kitchen drudge. Well, it all comes of marrying a Yankee."

"Yes; is n't it astonishing what a difference there is between the people of the two sections? No more alike than a French dancing-master and a country bumpkin; or a mulatto housemaid and a coal-black ploughboy! Pity, they don't stay where they can be appreciated, and marry among their own people. Mr. Belmont is a good man, as the world goes, and highly educated; but his poor family is

dreadfully crushed down by his grovelling nature. Poor Bertha is n't a bit like him there. She's high-minded and ambitious, as he is low and draggling, and feels her situation keenly. I've seen her cry over the unplastered walls and tumble-down palings."

"Yes; but it's an old saying, and I think a true one, that 'strange faces make fools fond.'"

"Well, that is n't saying much for Mrs. Belmont."

"Quite as much as she'd say of herself, I reckon."

"Wonder, if she'd try it again, if she were free now."

"Hm! I should think her fire-faded eyes and burned fingers would be a caution to her in future. What small hands she has!—a genuine Southern hand—never was meant to swing pots and kettles. You may tell a Northerner by the huge size of his hands and feet—"

"And stiff joints!" interrupted Minnie, with a shrug of her fair young shoulders.

"There's Jim Hanson works in the field like one of his own slaves during the week, and on Saturday mounts his glossy steed and goes dashing out to Log Chapel, in broad-cloth, kid-gloves, and Southern airs; while Mr. Belmont, if he favors his family at all, puts them into an antediluvian gig and trudges beside it, in well-worn satinet, and with big, bare hands—ugh! And just to think how genteelly they might live, with his education and income, if he had the ambition to rise above wash-tubs and pea-planting!"

"Very true. And so he has really purchased a slave?"

"*Really*, Ed. I was at Mr. Wallace's when the bargain was made. Won't it astonish the natives?"

"With his principles, I should think he would have given her free papers."

"Hm! that's another thing. Dr. Clark says he always found it to be an easy matter to bury *other people's* children. Who ever bought negroes for the philanthropic

purpose of setting them free? Catch *me* marrying a Yankee!"

"Or me, Min. Poor Bertha! her chance for it is painfully fair. Her father's house is the peddler's home, you know, and I should n't wonder if—"

"I know. She's hardly fourteen, and has n't finished her education; but that peddler Harwood is after her, and if her father commands it, she'll marry him, love or no love, for his word is law under his own roof; and Mr. Belmont has a strong partiality for his own people. Poor Bert! I mean to warn her against marrying a Yankee, with her Southern taste and temperament — *I will!*"

This was Mr. Belmont's reputation among his Southern neighbors. They abused and ridiculed him for his low living, and stood aloof from his family because of its Yankee head. Mr. Belmont thought but little of their neglect and reserve, and cared less; forgetting, in his selfishness, that his wife and daughter were social beings, and suffered from his indifference.

Bertha had but few friends and associates. At school she was so envied by the girls, because of the boys' admiration of her beauty, that they drew back from the lonely child, and whispered, malevolently, of her Yankee origin.

Edalia Redmond and Minnie Montrose were her fastest and best-loved friends. Prejudiced against Yankees, they pitied the situation of our heroine; and the two girls rarely met but Mr. Belmont came in for a good share of vituperation and abuse from their voluble little tongues.

They disliked him for his slovenly style of living and well-known principles, as much as they loved Bertha for her Southern spirit and affectionate disposition; and though they were his pupils for several years, Mr. Belmont did not succeed in winning the regard of the aristocratic little

friends of his daughter. Bertha would have been lonely indeed, but for these two girls. They were a pretty trio. Minnie was motherless, and Edalia was the adopted child of a bachelor uncle—both her parents were in their graves. Their homes were near, and daily intercourse was the delight of these three loving little creatures, as the years rolled them silently up to womanhood.

CHAPTER III.

JEALOUS.—“UNCLE NED.”

EDIE, Edie! come to trysting-tree!” and the gay girl clasped Edalia’s hand and pulled her through the little cottage-gate, down to the narrow footpath that sloped to the clear, cool spring, bubbling and sparkling beneath the old maple.

It was a sweet May morning. The skies, as they glanced now and then through a dense foliage of oak-leaves and interlaced limbs, matted and dripping with early dew, looked blue and smiling as the sweet spring violets that peeped up from velvety ridges of rich moss about the old oak-roots, and nestled in groups, half hid, among green grass that edged the wayside.

She was a bright, wild, free thing — Minnie Montrose; and her young heart was everlastingly running over with music and mirth through her beautiful blue eyes and very rosebud of a mouth.

Minnie lived just over the way from Edalia’s uncle’s and Bertha’s home; and last night a bright light had shone through the windows of Dr. Montrose’s mansion, from

candle-light till the chime of two; and, nervously, Edalia had longed for the dawn of day, to get the whole secret from little, simple-hearted Minnie. And not only this, but she had dispatched Dinah to the illuminated mansion, with full instructions to reconnoitre, and so forth, who returned with the soul-harrowing information that Mr. Charles Chester — *her* "Charlie" — was "setten up to Miss Min!"

How jealous she was! — and how she watched, from her chamber-window, with flashing eyes and lip gravitating toward the sill, till the last spark had gone out in the hall below, and streamed through the casements of Minnie's chamber; for Charles Chester was her young heart's earliest flame, but she had kept the light "under a bushel," lest it should be seen by "all that were in the house;" and now that he had forsaken her for a brighter, a fairer, and a gayer one, she resolved in her heart, on her restless couch that night, to smother the flame in its hiding-place, or snuff herself out in the arduous effort — in a word, to conquer or die! She wrote out in fancy, on the flag of firm resolve, the motto that should henceforth be hers: "Victory or Death!" And after repeating the touching lines of Sir Walter Scott, as an elegy for Love's Young Dream —

"Like the dew on the mountain,
Like the foam on the river,
Like the bubble on the fountain,
Thou art gone, and forever!"

poor, sentimental Edalia Redmond sobbed herself into an uneasy slumber.

Unusually early she was up this morning, and at her window, looking out for Minnie; but the muslin curtains that shaded her casements were undrawn, and she knew the object of her jealousy had not yet risen. Dispatching Dinah with a hasty message to the Doctor's, she descended

to the piazza, where the jessamine vines, laden with bright blossoms of the richest perfume, were winding and clinging around the white pillars and dewy eaves, where a little song-bird had built its nest, and was now busily employed in carrying food to its unfledged young, whose little open, golden-lined mouths she could discern, uplifted and piping, to receive the dainty vermicular morsel.

Mr. Redmond — familiarly called by the young girls of the neighborhood, "Uncle Ned," — crept up behind her, as she stood watching the callow young, and imprisoned one of her little ears in each of his big fists.

"Hey-day, Miss, — early riser! Think you'll find a husband this morning?"

"What, uncle?"

"Ha, ha, ha! little innocent! S'pose you don't know it's May-day? Snails don't crawl this morning, mebbby; and Miss Edalia Redmond isn't thinking of blue plates and sifted flour — ha, ha!"

"Uncle! indeed, I was n't thinking of that; and now you remind me, I'll go right off and 'scour the plain' for a conquest. Won't you go too, uncle?"

"P-o-o-h! fiddlesticks! What d'ye think, Miss? snails would write in my plate but *numbskull*! But yonder comes Miss Minnie in a flurry. *She's* off for a snail-hunt, I'll be bound."

And, sure enough, yonder did come the light-hearted maiden, bounding like a fawn down the green lawn, sylph-like, in her white muslin morning gown and black silk apron, with its long strings floating out behind like streamers in the breeze; and close astern followed Di, her white teeth and eyes shining in fine contrast with her smooth black skin. Edalia was at the gate in a twinkling.

"Success, young ladies!" shouted Mr. Redmond, his shrill voice following them through the shady woods; —

"success, young ladies, and don't forget the sorrows of a poor old *Bach*!"

It was a sweet spot, that by the crystal spring. The roots of the old spreading tree were cushioned with just the softest and greenest grass in the world, and spotted over with tiny white flowers, and blue violets that bent over the edge of the fairy fountain, and mirrored their meek eyes in its cool, clear depths. And over the little silvery rill that trickled from the fountain-urn, and crept along the white channel with a musical murmur, was the dark old pond, environed by a thick emerald belt of whortleberry and honeysuckle, covered with bloom and golden-winged bees, humming and buzzing in their fragrant cells. And then a world of music floated up from the deep purple behind the hedge, from the clear throats of a thousand morning birds, flitting and chirping, and shaking their glossy wings in exuberant joy, all through the cool shadows of the wild old pond.

The two girls dropped in beautiful abandon upon the green grass, and sat a while in silence; they were thinking of one who was wanting to complete the charm — lovely Bertha Belmont. And where was Bertha?

CHAPTER IV.

MINNIE'S CONFESSION.—THE PRISONER.

YOU won't laugh, Edie, if I tell you?" queried Minnie, looking roguishly up into her companion's sober eyes.

"Not if I know it, Min,"—but she *did* laugh for very spite.

Minnie clasped her small hands together right suddenly,

and a merry peal rang musically from her red mouth. Edalia was irritated. She said:

"In the name of sense, Minnie, are you growing wild?"

"I believe I am; but it's *so* laughable to think that I—let me see—just sixteen—am going to be married!"

Edalia started up, horror-struck.

"Married! To whom?"

"Why, Charley, child; dear, handsome Charley Chester, that I've worshipped from a wee bit of a thing. Don't you envy me?"

A sort of disappointed grunt escaped Edalia's vexed and jealous heart.

"Hm! I wish you joy of your prize, and hope your matrimonial bower may ever be as *green* as the age in which you are going to enter it!"

"Green!" and Minnie raised her sweet blue eyes with a quizzical expression. "I wonder what Walter would say to hear *that*! Would n't we have a coroner's inquest over his unfortunate self right early, and a verdict rendered of 'Death voluntary'?"

"Then he may die, for all I care! I'm certain I would n't marry Walter Eldon to save him from hanging!"

Minnie's eyes dilated with astonishment, for the truth was, to conceal her partiality for Charles Chester, Edalia had long permitted the supposition that Walter Eldon was the "one bright, particular star" that guided her along life's troubled sea, like the poor bird that affects distress to decoy adolescence from its little nest-home in the grass; and now that the lure had been effectual, she had suddenly spread her unbroken wings and darted away, when all imagined the victim was sure. A faint shade came over Minnie's bright face.

"Why, Edie Redmond! You won't reject Walter Eldon? Poor Wallie, it would break his heart!" and something

like the tiniest sparkle of a dewdrop shone in her young eyes.

"P-o-o-h, Min — 'fiddlesticks!' — as uncle would say, — hearts don't break so easily. They are only a troublesome appurtenance of the 'mortal coil,' fixed in the human breast by retributive power; a strange, incomprehensible, unfathomable structure — whalebone and India rubber — elastic as fancy, and strong as misfortune; it *won't* break when you'd have it, and more's the pity!"

The young girl gazed long in her companion's flashing eye, without a word; the truth was, surprise deprived her of speech. At length she said:

"Edie, you used to confide in me; won't you tell me your sorrow now?"

"Sorrow!" — and Edalia laughed gaily, by way of dissembling. "You don't deem me capable of feeling a deeper sorrow than the loss of a friend and companion from the sunny shore of celibacy into the wide rolling ocean of matrimony would occasion? Won't I be lonely when you are buried?"

Minnie twisted her white, bare arms around her friend's neck, with another merry peal that startled the birds from their leafy nooks.

"O-o-h, is *that* all? Then, cheer up, Edie, and don't lengthen out your phiz to such deacon-like dimensions; for Charley is to live with papa, and his bride will be found of Edie as often and as *near* as before she assumed so weighty a responsibility. But see here, Edie, there's a snail just at your feet, and, though I did n't think of it before, this is the first of May; so secure the prize, and let's consult the oracle with reference to your future destiny, for if you won't have Walter —"

"Plague take Wall, and the snail too!" ejaculated Edalia, peevishly, and had well-nigh landed the poor thing

in the pond-waves, in her impetuosity; but fortunately for her hidden heart, she thought of the absurdity of such an act, and what fancies it might awaken in Minnie's mind; and so she forbore.

Carefully lifting the white shell, with its worm-treasure timidly coiled up inside, upon a maple-leaf, the two girls bathed their faces in the cool spring waters, and started for the cottage.

Jovial Mr. Redmond was lounging in the piazza, and peeping through the vines towards the gate. The old gentleman poked his round, good-natured face through a loophole made by his two hands amid the leaves and blossoms, and shut one eye at the maple-leaf in his niece's hand.

"Hey-day, Miss, scared 'im up, did ye?"

"No, indeed, uncle; he scared me up. Like a true lover, the thing came and humbled himself in the grass at my feet; and so to imitate the example of the good, 'he was a stranger and I took him in.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! capital, by Jupiter! But, see here, Miss Minnie, where's *your* bug?"

"Could n't catch him, Uncle Ned. Snails all know when May-day comes, and having a radical aversion to writing,—like some correspondents who 'hate the very sight of a pen,'—they hide away in their dens till the danger is past; all but this poor novice, whose temerity will surely cause him to be laid on the table."

"Oh, blast the things! you did n't look!"

"Why no, Uncle Ned, I did n't much. The truth is," and she glanced coyly at the old bachelor, "I know my fortune, and ask no snail-prognostications."

"Oh-ho! *that's* it! And so the question's popped, eh? I'll bet two chincapins, the stopper flew out in the moonshine last night, and spilt every drop of the boy's timidity,

eh, Min?" and he chucked her egg-shell chin, and laughed complacently.

"But see here, Miss Redmond, you ain't going to be beat?"

"Why not, uncle? I'd like to know if Edward Redmond, Esq., was n't beat in his young day?"

"Oh, hang it! Catch *me* going down on my foot-handle-hinges to any female-woman, so long as I can take care of myself; unless Miss Bertha will have me, when she comes back. But you, Ed, want a protector."

CHAPTER V.

MR. PETERROY SIMPKINS OF PETUNIA PARK.

BUT you, Ed, want a protector," repeated Mr. Redmond; for Edalia's thoughts had wandered away to distant Bertha, at her uncle's allusion, and she failed to respond with characteristic quickness.

"And have n't I one in my worthy uncle? I'd like to know that."

"Fiddlesticks! But I'm an old man now, and who'll care for Edalia when I put out for 'parts unknown,' so well as handsome Peterroy Simpkins of Petunia Park?"

Minnie sprang to her feet and screamed with merriment at this allusion, and well she might; for said Peterroy — or Peter, as he was christened and called to Peter's indignation — was moulded much after the fashion of a rolling-pin, *i. e.* little at both ends, and big in the middle. Peter was decidedly dumpy — in fact, a globose lump of mortality; and had his equilibrium been upset on the brow of a hill, he

would probably have revolved in any position to the bottom as easy as a football. Peter was emphatically *round*, and might have sat in one of Shakspeare's 'Ages' for the 'Alderman's' portrait.

His *understanding* was incontrovertibly capacious, that is, so far as his *boots* were concerned; said boots being some inches longer than the generality of boot-jacks ever came in contact with. In fact, one of Mr. Redmond's carpenters once attempted to pick up Peter's foot for a shingle!

His head was round, too, and so little that his shiny silk hat, which under other circumstances might have seemed important, disdained to look dignified on so insignificant a caput, and slunk down obsequiously upon his shoulders.

His hair was *rather* light—that is to say, on the shady side of a nankeen; and each particular hair stuck "closer than a brother" to its fellow-sufferer, cemented in bonds of tenderest friendship by a daily and liberal application of castor oil. It curled, too, said hair did—thanks to sundry bits of paper that each morning appeared on Mr. Peterroy's toilet-table, in one round, full, golden roll, far below an attic-story shirt-collar that gloried in a vast quantity of starch and indigo, and stood up stiff as a college student, above his two little stingy-looking auditories that never were permitted to rejoice in the luxury of a grateful breeze.

His face was round, rough, and ruddy; flanked on both sides by a sparse "free-soil" growth of rose-colored whiskers; and in the northern section of the middle was located a "spirit-stirring" nose, that had evidently been taught from childhood to "hope on, hope ever;" for under all circumstances, and in every trying vicissitude, said nose was observed to be always cheerfully *looking up*.

His eyes were of an indescribable sandy and gray hue, and glittered under his short golden lashes like two stars on a frosty night.

But Peter was a man of extraordinary equanimity, independence, and unchangeableness; for Edalia could not remember the time, she declared, when his present pair of inexpressibles had a predecessor. In fact, they had evidently known the "growth of ages," or else shrunk up with fear during the horrors of the Revolution, judging from the amplitude of exposed leather at the nether extremity of his person, to which Peter's pants absolutely refused to do justice.

Such and so "handsome" was the individual referred to by Mr. Redmond as a suitable personage to assume the guardianship of his luckless niece after his anticipated demise. Truth to say, said Adonis had, from time to time, evinced a right good will to lay claim to said title, induced so to do, doubtless, by an avaricious survey of her uncle's broad acres and solitary heir, and presuming upon his own "chattels, personal and real estate,"—which consideration was a prop to Peter's chin, and the rod and staff that comforted him under circumstances of so peculiar a lack of personal attractions; and none could boast of a more erect and dignified gait, or higher bared his brow to drink the essence of the golden day, than Mr. Peterroy Simpkins, of Petunia Park, as Peter's paternal residence was aristocratically styled.

Peter's parents were of the most plebeian origin; but fortune's wheel had turned them over to wealth inherited from a distant relative when their only heir was ten years old; and thereupon Peter's homespun name was elongated by that self-sufficient young gentleman to render it more stylish, and his juvenile lordship put on airs to comport with his altered circumstances. Peter took to aristocracy as naturally as a duck to water. Unfortunately, in an evil hour for Edalia, she had touched some tender chord in Peter's sensitive soul, judging from the swell that upheaved

his linen bosom, producing a tergiversation among its crimped frill, and communicating the electric thrill to the golden roll that lay upon his coat-collar. Thereafter Peter was the great bugbear of her existence.

Minnie's face finally smoothed soberly down, after the outburst occasioned by Mr. Redmond's remark, and she said, demurely:

"I am greatly indebted to you, Uncle Ned, for this insinuation; it explains Ed's aversion to a union we have long considered inevitable, from past premonitions — poor Walter!"

"Poor Walter!" echoed Uncle Ned, with a face elongated to all possible dimensions. "Well, there's no contending successfully against fate. Marriages, they say, are made in heaven, and that's why the girls sometimes fly off like a parched pea just before the knot is tied; they get in the wrong pew at the beginning. 'Fantastic as a woman's mood,' wrote Scott. I used to think he was a confounded old churl for it; but 'the man's the gowde for a' that,' and knew more of the creature's nature than the old bachelor. Girls are just like kittens — they'll purr and look amiable, so long as you'll pat 'em and smooth 'em; but cross 'em a bit, and their dander is 'riz', like a yeast-loaf laid over till morning, and their claws into you like all possessed!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BREAKFAST-TABLE DISCUSSION.

POOOR WALTER! And so you've had a lover's quarrel, eh, Ed? Scratched him and quit, and turned over to Peter? Well, well, girl, what is to be will be, and I'll

bet two chincapins the bug has writ P S in the plate, and we'll have a wedding here before shortly, and beat Min yet — won't we, Ed?"

Edalia could have cried for spite and vexation; but smothering down the young volcano just ready to burst through a mountain of indignation, she said, with forced calmness and a spice of vindictiveness:

"I dare say we shall, uncle, if you and widow Wilmer resolve to 'live and love together' before September. Minnie offers herself as a sacrifice upon the hymenial altar at the glorious autumn time — poor thing!"

"Widow Wilmer! thunder! Why hang — I mean, bless the girl! You don't think I'm going to commit matrimony? I'd as lief stick my head in a hornet's nest, — blamed if I would n't! Widow Wilmer — thunder!"

"Well, so I think, uncle. One may find an antidote for the poison of a winged insect, but there's no balm in Gilead for a matrimonial sting, and I have no idea of subjecting myself to its horrors. 'After you' is manners for me, uncle, and I mean to follow in the footsteps of my illustrious predecessor."

"And die an old maid? I'll see you hanged first!" and the old gentleman snapped his eyes and fingers by way of emphasis.

"But I don't want to marry, uncle."

"Sin and sixty! — don't believe a word of it! There never was a girl yet who did n't 'live and move and have her being' in matrimonial speculations. Woman was made to marry, — man was n't so much."

"Very probable, uncle; when the Creator said, 'It is not good for man to be alone,' and gave him Eve to render him perfect. And besides, I like to know whom she's going to marry."

"Yes, there you are at the catch; but I say, *was n't* he

'perfect,' after it? If Adam had lived an old bachelor like me, he might have been in the garden of Eden yet, surrounded by angels — just as I am!"

"Many thanks for the compliment, Uncle Ned," said Minnie; "but I venture to say, if God had made the prohibition to Adam alone, he would have eaten the fruit without any temptation from the serpent, and consequently could have offered no plea in extenuation of his crime."

"Just so, Min," ejaculated Edalia. "The Creator knew woman's credulity, and man's irreverent daring, and to avert the calamity of wilful and unpardonable disobedience, He made the surpassing loveliness of Eve a palliative for man's transgression, and so laid the burden of his sin at the door of Satan."

"Oh, blast the—I mean, bless the girls! there's no sense or reason in 'em! When you think you've got 'em, they'll slip through your fingers with a contemptible hypothesis. Right or wrong, there's no holding 'em. But there's the bell, so let's leave fancy and take to reality;" and they all sat down to breakfast.

"I wish Bertha was here," said Minnie.

"So do I!" cried Edalia.

"And I!" added Mr. Redmond.

"Me too!" whispered Di, behind her young mistress's chair.

And where was our heroine? Away up in the western part of Carolina, at La Violet Seminary.

"Bert will make a splendid woman, with her rare beauty, and the education Belmont designs giving her," continued Mr. Redmond.

"But I'm afraid it will all be thrown away on some Yankee peddler," added Minnie, with a curl of her red lip.

"I hope not, I hope not! Bertha is too sensible to do a foolish thing," the old gentleman spoke, warmly.

"She'll do just as her father says, that's certain;—his will is law in the low brown house with the long piazza. He won't let her wear a bit of jewelry, and wants her to learn to cook, scrub, spin, and so forth, as the red-handed girls do where he came from; but Mrs. Belmont manages to keep her out of the kitchen. He's tooth and toe-nail against aristocracy. Hm! I wish he had *me* to deal with!" and Minnie's cherry lip curled more scornfully over her cup of fragrant mocha.

"Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined.' He has his peculiar sectional notions, but is evidently proud of his daughter, though he makes but little show of affection: that is a Northern characteristic. They make it a point to conceal warm feeling beneath a cold surface; 'pity 't is, 't is true.'"

"Well, I don't want to be loved under an iceberg!" chimed in Edalia. "If I can't feel the sunshine, it won't warm me, and might as well be under a cloud, so far as my physical comfort is concerned."

"Mr. Belmont is a noble-hearted man, say what they will of his Yankeeism," continued Uncle Ned, apologetically; "a more obliging neighbor, or honest mortal, don't tread Southern soil. Himself is his worst enemy. He'll lend when he needs the articles himself; and if they're lost or destroyed, he sets it down to fortuitous circumstances, and demands no indemnification. He's credulous and easy, to the injury of his family. The great pity is, that he married a Southern wife, and expects her to imbibe his Northern principles. 'When you are in Rome, do as Rome does,' is an ancient maxim that ought to be respected; but Belmont treats it with disdain. He thinks he's right, and is as stubborn as that new mule I bought last week—hang 'im!—the mule, I mean. I'll bring 'im into the traces, or break his neck, by Jupiter!—I mean the *mule*."

"I wish you had the same authority over Bertha's father,

Uncle Ned," said Minnie, laughing; "it's a sin and a shame to crush that poor child down so with his low-minded Northernism, when they might stand so high in the community. Why, he might easily be elected to Congress or the Legislature, if he had the ambition to aspire. He has sent her to the Seminary to prepare her for the drudgery of a teacher, they say — poor Bert!"

"I don't believe it," replied Uncle Ned, with an indignant thump of his fist upon the table.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BUG ORACLE.

AS Mr. Redmond and Edalia sat upon the piazza that evening, and the last beams of the setting sun slanted over the eaves, and lay in bright gold bars among the green grass, he said, suddenly:

"I say, Ed, time to look after your bug, eh? If the thing can't write P S in a whole day, why, then I say blast it! Where's Min?"

Di was a second time dispatched to the mansion, and soon its young mistress was observed posting over the green, with parted lips and mirthful eyes, swinging her straw flat most unmercifully by one string, in anticipation of seeing, as she expressed it, "the elephant."

In solemn Indian file they marched down the long hall towards the pantry, where, in obedience to Mr. Redmond's directions, Aunt Cora, the cook, had placed the shell-bug on a blue plate; thinly sifted with flour, with another plate

turned bottom up, over that, to prevent its escape; and above all was smoothly spread a snowy napkin.

Slowly and solemnly they marched; first, the squire, with a face that would have done infinite credit to any judge in Christendom — a face, in fact, that looked like a long ‘exclamation-point placed bolt upright after the word *matrimony!*’

Second, Min, with one corner of an embroidered pocket-handkerchief just visible between her red lips; the rest had all gone inside, and served as a sort of hatch to keep down the upgushings of a gleeful soul, that so longed to vent itself in merry peals, the tears actually stood in her eyes.

Third, Edalia, with a face as solemn as her uncle’s, and a compression of the small mouth that savored of vexation.

And lastly came Di, her great optics, like cotton-blossoms, well spread, shining over her mistress’ shoulder, with the thumb and forefinger of the right hand compressing her olfactories, while the other hand performed the same office for her lips, so as to suppress the smallest possible symptom of a titter.

After fumbling in a prodigiously deep pocket, that was, in truth, a regular curiosity shop, Aunt Cora drew forth a key, and throwing the bolt, they all entered the hall of inquisition. Ranging themselves around the table, a dead silence of a moment ensued. Even Minnie’s face smoothed down. Mr. Redmond folded his arms, and, with deep solemnity, asked:

“Who’ll say grace?”

The floodgates of Minnie’s risibility broke down here, and the tide of merriment came, in a rush, through her round open mouth. Di dropped on her knees, and out of respect for her master crawled under the table to give vent to her feelings in characteristic antics. Choking down the world of mirthfulness inspired by the ludicrousness of the scene, Edalia said, with astonishing gravity:

"I will, uncle."

"*You*, madcap? Well, go it, boots!"

"Oh, Guardian Genius, I thank thee, for the loving care and tender mercies vouchsafed to me, from the earliest dawn of my existence to the present hour; and humbly beseech a continuation of thy goodness, O Ruler of my destiny! especially in the foreshadowing of coming events, from the smooth surface of this blue plate! Grant, O Guardian Genius, to infuse into this 'lively oracle' a spirit of prescience, that the veil of futurity may be drawn aside, and the golden glow of its deep and marvellous mysteries reveal the hidden things of Fate from the smooth surface of this blue plate! Calmly and confidently I submit my destiny to thy wisdom; and with whomsoever thou shalt choose (save *one*) will I run with patience the race that is set before me! But, O Guardian Genius! by the memory of what has been, and the certainty of what will be, don't say — *Peter!*"

"Ha, ha, ha! — don't say Peter! Good, by Jupiter! — hanged if it is n't! Lord, give us *grace!* Ha, ha! he, he-e-e!" roared Mr. Redmond, rubbing his hands in excess of delight, and accidentally treading on Di's toes that protruded from under the table; which casualty produced a much higher key-note in her music, and somewhat modulated the velocity of his movements.

"But hark 'e, young ladies, I go two chincapins on P S and the bug, notwithstanding, and wondrous gift to Ed, if I lose — so let 's see;" and he exposed the poor snail snugly coiled up on the rim of the plate, with a trail extending from the bottom, and a multiplicity of lines drawn upon the white surface by the helpless captive, in its efforts to escape its close prison, probably.

Mr. Redmond and Minnie bent over it with the liveliest interest, her eyes twinkling like stars, with fun and expectation.

Edalia was apparently indifferent, but in reality would have given very much to see what alphabetical characters the traces most resembled ; for, having been left an orphan in infancy, and reared in the arms of Africa's descendants, it was but natural to suppose she had imbibed a considerable quantum of superstition inherent in that race; and though she could not reconcile it with more enlightened understanding and powers of reasoning upon natural principles, that a worm should be prophetic of future results, yet so repeatedly had she listened to the recital of marvellous events treasured up in the storehouse of these unsophisticated and credulous people's retentive memory, and so redundant was her imagination, that it subjugated her reasoning faculties, and she could scarcely separate what she heard from what she fancied, and consequently could hardly persuade herself that they were less than real. Such is the effect of association.

Judge, then, of the mighty palpitations of her anxious heart, when Minnie exclaimed, with a scream of delight :

"I've found it, Ed! — an S as true as fate!" and she clasped her small white hands, while a gush of merriment followed the announcement ; then, with a rueful countenance, she added, pityingly :

"Poor Edie! it's *almost* as bad as marrying a Yankee!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SIMPKINS VISITS MISS REDMOND.

I WON'T have him, I'll die first," ejaculated Edalia, in the excitement of the moment.

"Good! — ha, ha! — glory in your spunk!" responded

Uncle Ned ; "but there 's no use contending against fate ; and if the bug says 'Peter,' why, so it 'll be — that 's all. But, Min, it seems to me these bows are out of joint — both turn one way — bless my eyes if it is n't an E!" yelled the old gentleman, clapping his hands with a rousing report ; "and here 's something ahead looks decidedly like a W — four slantendicular lines met in two points at the bottom. W E — *Walter Eldon* — ha, ha ! hanged, if it ain't — by Jupiter !"

Edalia bent over the object of inspection, and entered into a critical examination. Sure enough, there were two rough-hewn, skeleton initials approximating the form and seeming of a W E as nearly as she could conceive it possible to be produced by aught so inexperienced in the art of caligraphy as the poor prisoner in "durance vile" before her.

"Well, Ed," said Mr. Redmond, "might as well begin to bury the hatchet — you and Wall — for the decree has gone forth. The bug says, 'Walter Eldon, thou art the man!'"

Edalia was brimful of spite, and it only required this spark of satire to ignite her mental magazine. She retorted :

"The bug has been unjustly arraigned before the bar of reason, and common sense renders a verdict of 'not guilty' of the grievous charge of prescience ; and I hereby declare it as my avowed and positive belief, that, so far as evidence is relied upon, adducible from these hieroglyphic substantiations, Edward Redmond, LL.D., has alone had a hand in it."

"If — hang me by the ears to the new moon, if I've seen the confounded plate since the bug landed in the meal ! I had a hand in it ! — Saucy minx ! I'm right glad now you've got to have 'im !"

"Got to have him ! Please your honor, Mr. Shakspeare says : 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-

hew them as we will.' You or the bug have cast my future in rather a rude mould; but determination has effected many a triumph over implied fate; and as I've heard you say, uncle: *Quid homo fecit faciat*. I'm invincibly resolved that the prediction of this bug-oracle shall never be verified,—for have him *I will not!*"

Aunt Cora, who had evidently heard the discussion, here popped her black head into the pantry.

"Ki! Lor' bless your heart, honey; 'tain't no use talkin'—you 's gwine to have Mars Wallie jes' as certen as day-brake! I never node snails ter fail yit. Dey seems to know *perzactly* what 's gwine on in heab'n, for when ole Missis was a little gal like you —"

Edalia stayed not to hear the interesting narrative of Aunt Cora, but hasted off to the parlor, where her laughing uncle and amused Minnie soon joined her.

"Tat, rat, *bang!*" went the door; and Di bounded to admit the visitor.

"I'll bet two chincapins that 's Peter!" said Mr. Redmond, rubbing his hands with delight. "It thunders up Olympus just like 'im! Miss Minnie, you do the amiable, for Ed 's mad as a hornet, and stingy as old cider. But Peter 'll palaver 'er, to kill — hark!"

"*Bon soir, mesdemoiselles; je suis charme de voir; comment vous portez vous?*"

Minnie responded:

"*Tres bien, je vous remercie, Monsieur.*"

Peter went on, addressing himself to Mr. Redmond:

"*Monsieur Redmond, je suis bien aise de vous voir en bonne santé. Que dit on de nouveau?*"

"Confound your Choctaw lingo!" ejaculated Uncle Ned, his eyes snapping with mirth; "talk plain English to a plain man, and the deuce take your hypherlut'n!"

"Esquire Redmond, I most importunately implore your

most gracious and magnanimous lenity for this unpremeditated innoxious introduction of Mr. Bolmar to your uncomprehensive scholastic acquirements. The world, sir, has experienced the mighty evolutions of a redintegrative process since the halcyon days of your adolescence; and I solicit the condescending extension of your clemency for this irrefragable evidence of its commendatory renovation and marvellous tergiversation. I simply expressed my ostensible and unadulterated gratification to behold you luxuriating in circumstances incontrovertibly salutiferous, and propounded the interrogatory in the transcendently euphonious dialect of trans-atlantic France, with immediate reference to the oscillating *on dits* of Madam Rumor, meritorious of communication."

"Ah, take a seat, Mr. Simpkins,—take a seat. Thank you; I'm *in statu quo*, as you perceive. News? aye, we have news—a bit that may, perhaps, be highly entertaining to one in your present interesting situation—I mean, independent bachelorhood."

Minnie smiled mischievously behind her thick clusters of golden-brown curls, and Edalia signified to her uncle, by unmistakable gestures, her disapprobation of an exposition of the day's adventure—but to no purpose.

The old gentleman continued, with a malicious leer:

"By the way, Mr. Simpkins, the young ladies and your humble servant have, to-day, been impanelled to sit upon the body of a deceased anchorite; and, after mature deliberation and much consultation, finally rendered a verdict of 'death from over-exertion in an arduous effort at chirography!'"

"Marvellous mystery!" enunciated Peter, his pale yellow eyebrows arching with curiosity. "Esquire Redmond, pray enlighten me with reference to this incongruous affair."

"Readily comprehended, sir, by the most ordinary capa-

city. Simply suggestive of shell-bugs, blue plates, and sifted flour."

Mr. Redmond sneezed, and blew his nose, strongly, after this confession, and Mr. Peterroy failed to catch the expression of his convulsed countenance.

Peter pressed one delicate hand that sported a magnificent diamond, upon the left pocket of his white vest, and shook the golden roll upon his coat-collar, with a prolonged bow, as he replied :

"Ah, the fair ladies have consulted the foreshadower of coming events relative to affairs appertaining to a felicitous state conterminous upon that of celibacy. Permit the unequivocal expression of an ebullient hope, that the result of the investigation has been highly conducive to delectable inspirations, in the pure hearts of the angelic experimenters."

Mr. Redmond's handkerchief was again brought into requisition, as he observed the direction in which the young gentleman's eye wandered ; and recovering gravity behind its friendly folds, he proceeded :

"Perfectly satisfactory, beyond question, Mr. Simpkins ; in proof of which see Miss Edalia's sedate face. Young ladies, sir, are terribly deceptive creatures, so far as the chief end and aim of their life is concerned, and invariably usurp the prerogative of a holy deacon, when most unfit, in feeling, to act in his capacity. Trust me, sir, maidens naturally resort to demureness to conceal some covert and gratified emotion."

Edalia glanced at the speaker, comprehended the motive that impelled the speech, and grew hastily communicative. But Peter was deluded and entrapped, in his simplicity and bigotry, by the ambiguous phrases of facetious Uncle Ned.

CHAPTER IX.

PETER GETS SACKED.

THE old clock in the corner chimed eleven, and Mr. Redmond rose, at a signal from Minnie, to escort her home. They vouchsafed Edalia one backward glance as they passed out.

She was alone with Peter. The cricket chirped on the hearth, and the tick, tick of his repeater was distinctly heard, in the profound silence that reigned supreme, after their departure.

"Will Miss Edalia condescend to inform me of the import of the bug-oracle's communication?" at length greeted her nervous senses.

Edalia evaded the inquiry, and he dropped heavily at her feet, upsetting an ottoman in his downward progress.

Submitting tacitly to the detention of both hands, the amused maiden listened patiently to an elaborate declaration, composed principally of polysyllabics, interlarded with French, and terminating with two exclamation-points in parenthesis!

If the bug had written P S in the plate, it would very speedily have been proven a "false prophet."

Peter retired in high dudgeon and no little mortification at the rejection of the suit of his consequential lordship; while Edalia went up to her chamber, with a quiet smile lurking in the corners of her small mouth at the remembrance of the recent ludicrous scene.

Her eyes fell upon a letter, as she approached the bureau, and as the superscription met her view, the young girl

caught it up hastily, with an involuntary exclamation that aroused Di, who was napping it on the hearth-rug.

"Lordy, massy! what's de matter, Miss Ed?"

"When did this come? Why did n't you tell me?" two questions in one breath.

"Oh, lordy!" whined Di, rubbing her sleepy eyes with both hands.

"I forgot it, Miss Ed. Mars Belmont called me over for it when you was at tea, an' I brung it up here an' furgot it — 'deed I did, Miss Ed! He said the mail got in later 'n usual."

"Now you *have* done it, you mean thing! It's from Bertha, and —"

"Oh, goody!" Di leaped up and clapped her hands, with a broad grin.

"And Minnie can't see it now till morning! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I'm *rale* sorry — 'deed I is, Miss Ed!" and Di looked so penitent that her young mistress kindly answered her inquiries respecting the writer's health, happiness, etc., and then bade her go to sleep again; which Di was by no means slow in doing.

Edalia's countenance changed many times during the perusal. Now it was solemn, then indignant; now compassionating, then furious; now it was white and stern, then a deep flush of evident anger swept over it.

She started up suddenly, firmly grasping the missive, and left the chamber noiselessly. A stranger might have read the kindness of her heart in the considerate feet that forbore to disturb a slumbering servant. Coarse-grained, ill-natured, and selfish beings may be known by their heavy step.

Edalia went down the long stairs swiftly, and tapped softly at her uncle's chamber-door.

"Hallo!" cried a voice inside.

"Have you retired, uncle?"

"Not exactly — got one leg out yet!"

"I want to come in, please."

"You do? — what the deuce! Well, hold on there till I slip into this wrapper. There, (throwing open the door,) could n't wait till morning to consult me about marrying Peter, eh?"

"Now don't, please! I'm just as mad as Tucker, Uncle Edward, and I can't sleep a wink till I've stirred up your ire too."

"A most charitable design, by Jupiter! Now St. Felix defend me from the witch! She's run stark mad, and mebbe may bite! — can't sleep a wink, and comes down here white as a ghost, to scare me out of my dreams! What the deuce is it, child?"

"I've got a letter from Bertha, uncle."

"Ha, ha, haw! — is that all, you torment! Blamed if I did n't think you'd got the hydrophoby, or some other rabid disease, from the shine of your eyes — ha, haw! Well, what the mischief is to pay with Bertha? — Bit by a rattlesnake, or run away and got married to some jackanapes?"

"Worse than that, uncle? Here, take this easy-chair, and I'll read you this stirring epistle, if —"

"Worse'n being bit by a rattlesnake! What the deuce is it?" The old gentleman stared at her in evident consternation.

"I meant a run-away marriage, uncle."

CHAPTER X.

OAK GROVE. — "THE ACADEMY."

THAT the reader may understand our heroine's letter more fully, we will go back a few months, and come up to the date of Bertha's address to her confidential friend, with some revelations.

It was a large handsome house, set down in a wide beautiful grove, with a broad avenue leading up to it from the sandy highway.

In front was a far-reaching corn-field, with African laborers singing merrily over the shining hoe and cutting plough; to the right was a smaller field, with a cotton-gin whirring and whizzing away, from morning till night, at the farther edge of the worm-fenced inclosure; to the left was a small building, near the yard, plebeian in appearance, but aristocratically styled "the Academy;" and beyond this stately residence loomed up the dark wild woods. With "the Academy" we have the most to do; but a portrait of the inmates of the wealthy home may not be inappropriate.

Colonel Wilmer, the head of the house, was a large, fat, red-faced, good-natured man, with gray eyes and gray queue, which was the rich man's pride, for it was the only queue in that section of the old North State. Colonel Wilmer had but one child—a blue-eyed, slender, sickly girl, Dora, whose heart was warm and generous, but whose intellect was not of a superior order. A brother and sister had gone to the grave early, and Colonel Wilmer and his dyspeptic wife were in daily dread of losing this only remaining scion of their wealthy house. Dora was the darling of their hearts,

was petted, physicked, and flannelled, until her white face grew sallow, her slender form seemingly consumptive, and her blue eyes dull and spiritless.

Mrs. Wilmer was a weak-minded, inquisitive, but amiable woman, if not thwarted in her wishes and designs. Her greatest weakness was envy and jealousy. She could not endure to have her daughter thrown in the shade by another's superior capacity, even though that other was her inferior in wealth and station; she forgot her womanly dignity, and betrayed a most lamentable defect in the noblest powers of the mind, by condescending to a controversy with a child.

Dora Wilmer was a pupil at LA VIOLET SEMINARY for a short time—only a short time. The girls of the neighborhood wondered why she had left so early, but Bertha Belmont never learned the secret until she became a pupil at the same institution. Dora's delicate health was the avowed cause. That was Miss Wilmer's last experience in boarding-school life. A "governess" was obtained from Connecticut for the young heiress, and the girls of the neighborhood were invited to become pupils with Dora. A small, select class was formed, among which was our bright and beautiful heroine. Colonel Wilmer was what is termed "close" for a rich man; for a poor one, it would have been "mean." And by securing a certain number of scholars for his daughter's "governess," her salary would not all come out of his plethoric purse. It might have been made a money-making business with the Colonel; whether it was or not, we will not assume the responsibility of saying. We leave it to the reader to judge of the probability from the circumstances to be related.

Miss Hinzman, the teacher, was a fair, frail, girlish blonde. Bertha Belmont loved her. But she was not long permitted to enjoy the advantages of her society and instructions.

Miss Hinzman, in a few weeks, was reduced, by disease, almost to death's door, and at the earliest possible moment left the lonely spot for the more congenial atmosphere of Norfolk. Bertha, Edalia, and Minnie, grieved over the loss of their gentle-hearted friend. Colonel Wilmer and family uttered no word of regret.

Miss Watruff, of New York, was the successor; wholly unlike, in mind and person, — squat form, large black eyes, and hair of the same hue, pomatumed to the last degree of oleaginous heaviness. Both showy and vain, and wholly unsympathizing, she failed to win the affection of our Bertha and her two best friends.

The old building denominated "the Academy" was moved up from the woods to the yard, and the new teacher commenced her duties with a dignity and stately reserve meant to awe her pupils into reverence for the august, little, dumpy individuality.

It was drawing-day, and Bertha had finished her sketches and presented the sheet to Miss Watruff for inspection. She stood silently beside her "chair of state," watching her countenance, to catch its expression of approval or disapprobation. The brunette face remained immovable. Finally she said, doubtingly, without lifting her eyes from the drawing:

"Did you do this?"

"Yes, ma'am," — Bertha wondered at the strange query, until the truth crept into her young mind and brightened her brown eyes.

"It's very well." Miss Watruff returned the drawings and turned away with cool indifference. No smile of encouraging approval accompanied the words, "It's very well."

Bertha knew it was "well," and so did her two friends, who made mouths at the teacher, privately, for her stingy

praise; but Bertha was secretly hurt by Miss Watruff's cool commendation.

Dora was also stung by even this sparse praise. She bent over to Bertha, and whispered, invidiously:

"You feels as big as a governor!"

Our heroine smiled at Dora's poor grammar, and poorer spirit. She comprehended now the head and front of her offending; the drawings were too well executed to suit Dora, but why her teacher should treat them so indifferently she could not divine. She learned the truth subsequently.

Colonel Wilmer was an admirer of talent;—no matter how poor and obscure a child might be, if it evinced talent, Colonel Wilmer was its friend and patron. A handsome young English wanderer, whose quick wit had attracted the old gentleman's notice, had so ingratiated himself into the rich man's affections by his extraordinary gifts of mind, that he had been forthwith installed in the Colonel's family as one of its members, and entered as pupil to Mr. Belmont, with his own son, previous to the death of that noble young son.

Thomas Wilmer was plain in person; but the poet's assertion, "*the good die young*," was fully verified in his death. The fairest, purest star of the Wilmer race set in his slender grave, and shines on immortal in the glory land.

Thomas was his *father's* son, and the "closeness" attributed to that father might have proceeded from another source. Many an innocent dog, like poor Tray, has been soundly thrashed for being found in bad company.

Thackeray says: "Since the days of Adam there has hardly been a mischief done in this world but a woman has been at the bottom of it."

We shall see.

They were gathered around the tea-table—Colonel Wilmer, wife, daughter, teacher, and adopted son, Leroy Danvers.

Leroy was now twenty years old, very handsome and manly, but atheistic, as Englishmen unfortunately usually are. The young man was a genuine admirer of our heroine, and made no secret of his preference during their association as schoolmates; and his visits to the low brown house with the long piazza were regularly continued, when Mr. Belmont had received the appointment of Postmaster, and resigned his school. Bertha was shy of the enamored youth, for his profanity, overheard on several occasions, repulsed her. She admired his beauty and talents, but shrank from the wicked possessor.

The good-natured Colonel addressed himself to Miss Watruff, as they discussed the dainties of the tea-table that pleasant eve.

"And how do you find Miss Bertha as a scholar?—bright as a new shilling, eh?"

"I never knew an apter pupil, sir. She progresses surprisingly, particularly in drawing and music. She is so far advanced in other studies that her improvement in them is not so perceptible."

"I told you so. She was always at the head of her class in *our* school"—and Leroy looked over at the Colonel, with a bright face.

"Ah, young gentlemen in love are not very impartial judges; I make some allowance for your raptures, my boy, on that score; but I always knew Bertha was smart;"—this was invariably the good man's word for "talented."

Leroy colored slightly, and laughed gaily, at this well-meant and well-merited shot in the presence of a stranger—and that stranger a little black-eyed young woman.

Mrs. Wilmer bit her thin lip, as she remarked, dryly:

"I never discovered anything specially remarkable in that child; she is not destitute of brains, nor gifted with more than an ordinary share. If she learns well, it is

simply because she is forced to it by her Yankee father, who, I believe, designs her to get her living by teaching."

This was stepping on the teacher's toe with a vengeance, and her countenance betrayed her consciousness of the ruthless compression; but it produced the desired effect, for Miss Watruff never thereafter laid herself liable to a second affront by praise of Bertha Belmont. Had she been a true woman, this expressed "belief" of Mrs. Wilmer would have inspired her with deeper interest in the advancement of one who was designed for her own profession; but Miss Watruff was too vain and selfish to sacrifice the smiles of Mrs. Wilmer by doing justice to her gifted young pupil. Miss Watruff loved the praise of men and novel-reading more than to do justly, and stem the tide of opposition in the performance of duty; for Bertha never saw her at home, out of the "Academy," but she was deep in the mysteries of a romance. But our heroine did not condemn her for this, for she herself was "in the same condemnation."

Mrs. Wilmer was not justifiable in this belief relative to Mr. Belmont's intention respecting his daughter; for no such design had ever been entertained, much less expressed, by Bertha's father; he was too proud and fond of his only daughter — notwithstanding his seeming to the eye of the world — to lay such plans for her future. Though not wealthy, he possessed a competence; and necessity alone would subject his only daughter to the drudgery of a school-room. Mr. Belmont's motto was: "Prepare a child, by education, for any emergency in life;" and he acted upon it with reference to his own children.

But Mrs. Wilmer found it very convenient to make this supposed purpose of Bertha's father the cause of her rapid advancement and mental superiority to her own daughter; ignoring the truth that an ordinary capacity cannot be pushed into extraordinary acquirements.

Bertha entered the parlor, one day, at "Oak Grove" — the title by which Colonel Wilmer's residence was distinguished — for music-practice. She was allowed but three-quarters of an hour — a thing unheard of in other institutions; but the piano was a new one, just imported from Yankee-land, and Mrs. Wilmer was particularly tender of its polish and tone.

She had practised but a little, when Mrs. Wilmer made her advent and exerted her powers to divert the pupil's attention by a display of newly-arrived paintings for copying in the "Academy." Bertha submitted patiently, a while, to the imposition; but her time was expiring unimproved, and she knew she would not be permitted to extend it; and as her kind friend evinced no weariness or symptoms of cessation in elaborating upon the beauties of the water-colors before them, she turned quietly to the key-board, and gave her a pianissimo hint from its ivory, but without effect. Bertha was not to be drawn off again and cheated out of her full time, but she touched the keys softly, by way of respect for the lady's commenting voice.

Mrs. Wilmer's passions became inflamed by ineffectual efforts to engage her undivided attention further, and she flounced out of the room, exclaiming wrathfully, "I believe you think a *pie-anner* (this was Mrs. Wilmer's style of pronouncing the instrument) is the greatest thing in the world!"

Bertha "believed" she thought her father would have to *pay* for the use of the instrument, whether she practised or not; and she "believed" it to be her duty to him and herself to improve her time. Child as she was, she blushed for the woman, forty years old, who had exposed such jealous weakness of mind for so trivial a cause. Our heroine left the parlor with eyes open to Mrs. Wilmer's true character.

CHAPTER XI.

BERTHA'S TRIALS AT "THE ACADEMY."

IT was a day of excitement at "the Academy," for the paints had arrived for Miss Watruff's pupils, and, girl-like, each one was eager to peep beneath the polished lids at the small bright cakes. But disappointment awaited each young heart, for a proclamation was issued to the effect that the boxes would not be distributed until to-morrow.

When Bertha arrived at the "Grove" next morning, the paints had all been dealt out, and she caught up the one designed for herself, and smilingly drew back the lid with youthful eagerness. What a wreck met her astonished vision! Not a single unbroken cake was discovered in the box, but crushed into tiny pieces, irregular and unmatched, they lay cracked and shivered in their small receptacles. Bertha was struck dumb, for a moment, while Dora and her friends looked on with cool indifference.

"Why, what in the world!—" was our heroine's exclamation.

"They got broke coming on," Dora said, by way of apology for the wreck.

"And are they all like mine?" Bertha asked, regretfully.

Minnie Montrose broke forth, indignantly:

"No! Dora Wilmer's has n't a broken cake in it!—her cousin May's has but one, cracked across the middle; and the next best is her flatterer's, Alice Warding. Yours is the meanest in the whole lot, and mine and Ed's are first cousins to it!"

Bertha's quick mind grasped the truth in a moment.

Her lip curled slightly as she looked full into Dora's dull, wincing eyes, and said, sarcastically:

"Strange that mine should be a total wreck, and Dora's wholly uninjured!"

"No; it is n't a bit strange when you know the secret of it!" thundered Minnie. "The boxes have all been picked over, and the best put into *theirs*, and the scraps into *yours*. Don't you see?"

Bertha thought she did; and the meanness of the deed scorched her sensibilities. She replaced the lid, and laid the box on Dora's desk, saying, firmly:

"*I won't have it.* Pa will order one for me from Tarborough. I can't afford to pay as much for scraps as you do for a decent box."

Away went Dora, May, and Alice towards the dwelling, after this indignant refusal of our heroine to accept what they had rejected, and meant to impose upon her; their skirts flapping in the breeze, as they ran to bear the news to discomfited Mrs. Wilmer, who had aided and abetted in the intended cheat, and whose penurious soul shuddered with apprehension of losing the amount marked upon the broken and worthless box. She had not dreamed our heroine capable of such open rebellion against her moneyed authority, notwithstanding the memory she retained of the music-room. Bertha's deportment had ever been so gentle and respectful that the information of her positive declension to submit to such shameful imposition startled her by the magnitude of Miss Belmont's audacity.

During recess, a servant informed our heroine Mrs. Wilmer desired an interview. She went — wholly unprepared for the storm that awaited her.

From early childhood — that is, from the time Mr. Belmont located in the neighborhood — Bertha and Dora had been warm friends, as well as their parents, until Bertha's

beauty and talents quite eclipsed the young heiress, as they verged upon womanhood, and a coolness sprang up between the female portion of the two houses, owing to the jealousy of Mrs. Wilmer. Col. Wilmer's admiration of talent was far superior to his prejudice against Yankees; and notwithstanding the disparity in their pecuniary circumstances, the two families were intimate friends and associates, until "Bertha the Beauty" — as she was designated by common consent — attained the age of fourteen.

Bertha responded to Mrs. Wilmer's call; and such a burst of abuse and violent anger never before broke above the defenceless head of an innocent, unsuspecting child. Our heroine was confounded by the unlooked-for tornado of passion; but she partially recovered her self-possession before the wild storm subsided in exhausted epithets. Mrs. Wilmer vowed she *should* have the box, and threatened her with terrible punishment if she *dared* to refuse. Her father had ordered it for her, and she was n't going to lose the value of it for her (Bertha's) meanness.

Bertha thought the "meanness" lay in another quarter; but she simply reiterated her language to Dora, — who, with her two friends, was eavesdropping at the door, — and quite spiritedly assured Mrs. Wilmer she would not buy such a box of worthless scraps, that had been picked out of the others and put into hers.

Bertha turned away, indignantly, to Mrs. Wilmer's astonishment, with a visible hint of spirit-scorn about her small mouth, and passed out of the wrathful presence, where she had stood during the raging of the waves, as Mrs. Wilmer had not honored her with even common politeness by offering her a chair — stumbling over Dora as she opened the door to retire.

At the close of the school that evening, while Bertha awaited her father's gig, to take her over the space of two

miles, home, Mrs. Wilmer visited "the Academy," and took particular pleasure in slighting and insulting our young heroine. Miss Watruff failed to show her decent respect in the presence of the rich woman, who, she knew, and for what reason, hated the poor pupil. She curried favor with Mrs. Wilmer by slighting Bertha.

That was our heroine's last day at "Oak Grove Academy." She never entered the residence of Colonel Wilmer again.

Mr. Belmont was a man of remarkable equanimity and generosity, but his patience was sorely tried by the system of annoyance and imposition practised upon his daughter. He firmly resolved she should not be subjected to it longer. He visited the Grove the day following, and declared his determination of discontinuing Bertha as a pupil.

Colonel Wilmer expressed his regrets for the cause, and praised our heroine's talents in no stinted terms. The good old Colonel was a genuine admirer of the young girl; and jealous, persecuting Mrs. Wilmer found no sympathy in her liege lord.

Mrs. Wilmer was sadly disappointed by the result of her unfeeling and unwomanly conduct. She had thought to browbeat and bend Bertha to her purpose, and throw obstacles in the way of her advancement; when, lo! Greek had met Greek, and she had but impaired her own interest and reputation; for even her wealth did not screen her from neighborly remarks privately uttered.

Mr. Belmont now carried his daughter to La Violet Seminary, distant eighty miles westward, among the mountains.

CHAPTER XII.

BERTHA'S DESCRIPTIVE POWERS ARE EXERCISED.

MR. REDMOND sank down upon the easy-chair, drawn up by Edalia for his accommodation, with a puzzled expression upon his good-natured face, while the niece seated herself upon a country-cushioned stool, at his feet, with one elbow resting upon his knee, and read :

"LA VIOLET SEMINARY, April 19th, 18—.

"MY DEAR EDIE:— I am tired — *so* tired. I am lonely — *so* lonely — sick, sorrowful, and half desperate! I wrote you weeks ago, but no word in reply has come to cheer my sad and suffering heart. I *know* the fault is not in you, my faithful, affectionate friend, and I'm quite *sure* I know where it does lie. These people are afraid of losing me, or, rather, my father's gold, and intercept my letters. How do I know this? I will tell you, some time. But where there's a will there's a way, and I'm going to circumvent them — *if I can*. The postmaster here is as mean as the proprietor of this establishment, and that is fully enough for one human being! I will post this myself, and if I get no reply, I will *post* something else. This you cannot comprehend until I give you a verbal explanation. I have had but one letter from home since I came to this mean, miserable, mercenary place. I have been sick ever since I put foot under this wretched roof. Pa has, doubtless, informed you of the submerging we got coming on; for there is no sneaking with *him*. W. K. Wilmer and wife were overturned in the same place; and kept it concealed, instead of warning Pa of the way. We got the whole truth from the family who rescued them as well as us. Dear! dear! what poor apologies for men there are in this world! That *ducking* process gave me a severe cold, from which I am yet suffering, not having received a particle of care from this

unsympathizing, heartless family. I could bear it better if I could hear from home; but I was weak enough to betray the fact to one of the pupils here, that I had written Pa to come for me, as my health rendered me unfit for study. I have not received a letter from any one since that confidential confession. Can you not imagine the cause? That girl — Angeline Daveling, of Petersburg — drew me out, by false pretences of like home-sickness, tender sympathy, and dislike for the people and place, and then sneaked out and betrayed me to Mrs. Browzer! I've grown a little wiser, if not happier, since I came here, and my organ of cautiousness has developed somewhat. That girl is an ugly-looking concern physically, and with my knowledge of her deformed soul, just imagine what a mortal scarecrow I see daily at the Seminary! I hate *meanness*! The very atmosphere that surrounds a mean mortal nauseates me; and, goodness knows, we have little else in this horrid home! We are half starved as well as frozen. We are made to sleep in the attic without a spark of fire, and shiver and shake from sunrise till breakfast, with snow three feet deep mocking us through the loophole of a window, from the bleak, desolate world without this dreary, dreadful den. And yet there are pleasant, fire-lighted chambers under this roof that might be made *home* to the pupils, if the hearts of the proprietors were not wholly of *stone*. Then we are fed on black tea, with half a thimbleful of milk (when we get any), and stale loaf-bread without butter. Sometimes we have black molasses and one biscuit for dessert. If we venture to accept a small piece of ham for supper, we are told by Miss Madge Browzer — who teaches painting — in her coarse, masculine voice, that "*ladies* don't eat meat." And yet when a parent visits a pupil here, honey and butter overflow, every luxury abounds that can tempt the appetite until they depart; then we poor mortals have "to pay dear for the whistle" the proprietors blew during the visitor's stay. We are always glad to see a strange face in the dining-room; for we know we shall get one more good meal! I've promised my best dress to a servant here, to supply me with dry bread during the session, in order to save me from starvation. And this is the place Dora Wilmer suffered me to come to, when one friendly, generous word of warning would have spared me

all the suffering her mother's jealousy and injustice have subjected me to. I could have learned *so* much there, if Mrs. Wilmer had acted the *woman*, and not the weak-minded, envious *child*. I have learned but little here; I'm too sick and miserable for school-duties. I do try to study and improve my time, and "finish my course" here; for I know if I return before the close of the session, it will rejoice my enemies at "the Academy." Mrs. Wilmer well knows the character of this Seminary; she knows one poor pupil was suffered to die here before the Browzers would inform her parents of their child's illness, lest they should lose the money for her board and Dr. Browzer's medical bill! And yet, should I be forced to *abscond* from this earthly purgatory, Mrs. Wilmer would not seek to justify the act, from facts positive and her daughter's sad experience, but turn it to my disadvantage and injury. This I know, else I would have *run away* (don't start at the ugly term until you are placed in my position) rather than endure all that is imposed upon pupils in this heartless place. My poor teacher yearns to escape from this iron cage as eagerly as her young pupils, and will fly the first opportunity. She is forced to share our fate in the attic, and fare, and her sunken blue eyes fill with tears at the sound of the sweet word "home." Just think of putting a teacher in a carpetless attic without fire—and the room-mate a housemaid! And yet, when she first came, a lower chamber, cosy and clean, was hers, with the Browzer girls for room-mates; but when the novelty wore away, they hustled her up to the garret! She is all I have to love, here—all that loves me, otherwise I could not have endured it till now. I *could not* live without love. I'd rather die and be buried than live alone and unloved. Miss Herbert is a dear, sweet girl—only eighteen. I lie down in her arms and cry, with her soft voice trying to soothe me, when I know her *heart* is weeping as freely as my eyes! Like her pupils, she looks and longs for letters from home and friends, that never come.

This establishment, Ed darling, is like a partridge-pen, has a fine lure to the door that is mighty easy to enter, but everlastingly hard to get out of! I promised to give you a description of the place and people. I fulfilled it in my first; but that has never been received, I feel confident.

Perhaps this will share the same fate; but it's a relief to write, so here's a repetition.

LA VIOLET SEMINARY

is a lonely, *lost*-looking institution, sits back from the road half a mile, with wild, nightmare woods hemming it in on all desolate sides. I feel as though I had been dropped, in a torpid state, from the cold, gray sky, and woke to find myself in a big bleak hole, with a black rim all around, too high to afford the slightest possibility of escape. Not a habitation is visible wherever the eye turns; all is monotonous and melancholy from this lonely prison-house.

The days are one long-drawn, dragging sigh, and the evenings are horrible with Guinea quacks until dark. You know my abhorrence of Guinea fowls — their doleful “ke-whack! ke-whack!” always sounds “oh, death! oh, death!” to me; and, as if to render this dreadful spot more terrible, those funeral fowls are too numerous to mention, in this inclosure, and make night hideous after the dreary day. All is sombre and solemn; even the negroes have long faces and lonesome airs.

Dr. Browzer is an easy, indolent man, who delights in backgammon, and corn in a liquid state. Miss Daveling softly asserts, it has been his habit to begin at the head of the stairs and roll to the bottom under peculiar circumstances; but *I* have not, as yet, witnessed the undignified performance. He advises his boarders to imbibe freely of cold water every morning before breakfast, which evidences his kindness of heart and most commendable charity, well knowing *that* is the only practicable method of *filling up* for the day.

Mrs. Browzer is a yellow-faced hypocrite of the first order, about forty-five years old; sports pink ribbons on her dress-cap, and affects youthful gaiety and graces. She talks sugar and cream one moment, and the next shakes her fist slyly, through the window, at a little nigger in the yard. I've witnessed *that* performance. Her voice is soft and mellow as May moonlight, and one would think her a saint, until they caught the sinner at her sly tricks. It is said they were once wealthy, and I wish they had continued so — *I* should be happier, I'm sure.

Rena Browzer, the second girl, (the oldest is married and gone,) gives lessons on the harp, and plays the violin with her *left hand*. I thought her pretty and good, until she abused me for weeping, when my heart was almost broken, instead of comforting me with kind words and womanly sympathy. I shall never think Rena Browzer handsome and good again, if I live a thousand years. It's the pure, gentle heart only that makes a lovely face, say what they will of physical charms. She is soon to be married to her sister's brother-in-law, and I only wish he could have heard her abuse me, — if he has any sense of honor, it would save him from similar abuse in the matrimonial state. I sincerely hope she may get her match, when she marries him; and if she does, he will be fire and tow, or a magazine with a lighted match under it!

Madge Browzer is distressingly homely, and considers herself a beauty! — wears *very* long curls on either side of her fat, rough face (put up in bits of paper in damp days), and a little pig-tail knot behind, that gives her stately head a most laughable conformation. She adores dress, and talks *dictionary* from *A* to *izzard*. It would be exceedingly interesting to hear her and Mr. Peterroy Simpkins engaged in conversation; indeed, it would be as good as a farce." (Mr. Redmond here laid himself back, and shook his sides with suppressed laughter.) "She's sarcastic and supercilious and cold as an iceberg to all but the rich, unless flattered into warmth and smiles by one as poor as herself. Angeline Daveling understands the art of sweetening her vain ladyship to perfection. It makes me sick to witness the deceitful creature's wiles. But Miss Daveling is compensated for the labor of "soft-soaping" her, by the gracious gift of a cold biscuit before dinner, which gratified Madge, in a spasm of generosity, actually rewards her with! Then Angeline runs up to her attic, and laughs, jubilantly, at "the nice way she put the feather over Miss Vanity's gray eye!" wholly unthinking of the disgust and contempt with which she herself is regarded by her "partners in distress." She's the most treacherous girl I ever knew. Madge dearly loves to talk of beaux, and hints loudly of "a certain young doctor in the Navy," which is none other than Bertrand Cobler, formerly of our section! Just think of Dr. Cobler,

who courted Polly Wilmer for her money, marrying a poor teacher! If Madge owned fifty negroes and a thousand acres of land, there 'd be some hope for her, in *that* quarter; but if vanity could compensate for lack of wealth, she 'd stand a fair chance anyhow! She walks like a peacock in full strut, and I often think it's a pity she does n't look at her toes, — "Oh wad some power the giftie gie us," etc. She 'll make a sweet wife for some poor soul, if one should happen to bite at her bait, and ingulf the barbed hook of matrimony.

Ella Browzer, the youngest of the family, is a grown-up baby—too young to be mean and mercenary, and too large to be considered a child. She's much larger than I am, though two years younger. She plays in the dirt with the little niggers, and has no more feeling for her parents' starving and freezing boarders, than the great cat she hugs and kisses continually! Ella is the handsomest one of the family, and has decidedly the best heart — would make a noble woman, if she were properly trained.

How do you like the portraits hung up in the Seminary, Ed dear? Fine, are they not, for the daily contemplation of a poor, sick birdling, taken from its nest-home of love and care for the *first time*? I shall go mad, if I remain here much longer — I know I shall! I'm half crazy now; and but for fear of Mrs. Wilmer's malicious tongue, I'd risk my reputation (which is dearer far than life) by escaping secretly from this unfeeling, soulless den. If you should *happen* to get this, by all that is merciful, help me to escape. I've tried hard to learn enough of the theory of music, to practise without a teacher, and I think I can get on without one. Anyhow, as eager as I am for knowledge, I'd rather rely upon chance for obtaining it, than remain here a day longer. I might manage to live through the session, on dry bread and black tea, if there were feeling hearts and kind words to help me on. But to be caged up here, in a sunless hole, and not even permitted to read a line from home, is more than human nature can bear much longer. I —"

Mr. Redmond never heard the few remaining lines of Bertha's long letter, for Edalia broke hopelessly down here, and cried heartily for both sympathy and *spite*!

The indignant old man sprang up right nimbly, and knocked his fists together by way of emphasis, while his sober eyes flashed.

"The soulless imps!" he growled; "she shan't stay there two days longer, by thunder! If Belmont don't start for her to-morrow, I'll go myself, by Jupiter!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BERTHA'S BRAVERY.

POOR Bert! — poor little thing!"

It was Minnie who uttered it, as she read the letter next morning, up in Edalia's chamber. Minnie raved in characteristic style, as she blew her small nose and wiped her wet eyes.

"I wish they had *me* to deal with!" was her closing remark.

Minnie had no idea she would have found more than her match, if they had. Bert was too easy, she said. "She'd defy the whole Browzer tribe, with a good many to help them, to keep *her* in such a den, if she wanted to get out. Old Mrs. Wilmer might talk, and welcome."

She comprehended now the full import of the mysterious smile that hovered around Dora's wide, pale mouth, when the news of Bertha's departure for La Violet Seminary was heralded at "the Academy." She was glad Bertha was going to be punished for being her superior in talent!

Then she hurried down the stairs, at Mr. Redmond's call, and went over to the low brown house with the long piazza. But Mr. Belmont was gone, and Mrs. Belmont was

in tears over a heap of letters that had arrived from Bertha the evening previous, and should have been distributed along the weeks since she left her home. They had all come in one mail! And why? Bertha had absconded from the Seminary, and there was no longer any necessity for withholding her letters; they all came in a batch; and Mrs. Belmont was weeping for the sufferings of her daughter that they revealed. Dr. Browzer had dispatched a messenger to inform Mr. Belmont of his daughter's secret departure, who had arrived last night, and Mr. Belmont had hurried away at daylight, to bring the runaway home. He smiled over the thought of the daring spirit that would not submit to oppression and wrong.

Edalia's letter had arrived in the bundle over which Mrs. Belmont was grieving.

"That's the secret, Ed!" broke forth Minnie, — "your letter is dated April 19th, and this is the second of May. It ought to have come a week ago; and you wouldn't have got it at all if Bert had n't run off — poor thing!"

"I say, blast the whole kit and posse!" growled Uncle Ned; "I mean to offer for Congress, and *hire the people to elect me*; and when I get there among the swell-heads (who do nothing but quarrel and fight and disgrace the country), I'll offer a resolution prohibitory of all seminaries. They're treacherous traps, anyhow, and only kept by skinflints and broken-down, heartless high-flyers — by Jupiter!"

"You shall have *my* vote, then, without pay, Uncle Ned," laughed Minnie.

"We might have been spared this, if Mrs. Wilmer had been generous," said Mrs. Belmont. "Dora knew the hard lot of a pupil in that institution, and yet suffered us to be entrapped — disregarding the commandment, 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you.'"

Mr. Redmond spoke up, warmly:

"Ah, my dear madam, if they knew enough of the Bible to repeat a single passage, your daughter would not have been constrained, by imposition and little-souled envy, to leave the school at the Grove."

"*'The Academy,'* Uncle Ned," corrected Minnie, with a twinkle of her merry eye.

"Ugh! ugh!" growled the old man; "Academy in a nut-shell! I say, hang the thing that don't equal in dignity and size the name it bears. You may call a dog a lion, but it won't change the nature of the beast. You can't make a mountain out of a mole-hill; and it's simply ridiculous to give high-sounding titles to low-sailing crafts, like plain Peter converted into Peterroy — ha! he! haw!"

Mrs. Belmont smiled; Minnie clapped her hands and danced to the music of a merry laugh; while a rich blush brightened Edalia's cheeks, beneath the significant glances of the three.

"By the way, Mrs. Belmont," continued the fun-loving old man, "Peter got sacked, last night; even his grand name could n't save him!"

"Or his big words!" chimed in Minnie.

"Then somebody has an enemy for life," said Mrs. Belmont, quietly. "Peter will never forgive the deep sin of being rejected — beware of his vengeance!"

Mr. Redmond threw his head back for a strong laugh, and unconsciously bumped it heavily against the buffet.

"Ugh! ouch!" he groaned, rubbing his gray hairs stoutly with both hands; "that concern's harder'n my head, by Jupiter! Blamed if it hain't knocked all the laugh out'n me!"

There was a fine concert of mirth at this remark, which realized the good old man's hopes. He had found Mrs. Belmont in tears, and had resolved to leave her in smiles.

Mr. Redmond was a truly benevolent man.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. REDMOND STARTLES EDALIA.

EDALIA was equipped for a visit to the church-yard — her daily resort since the soul-harrowing intelligence of Charles Chester's engagement — and was descending the steps with a sentimental "let concealment like a worm i' the bud" air, that she had acquired to perfectibility, from sympathy for the unfortunate heroines of the most fashionable novels and light literature with which her chamber abounded, when the cheerful voice of Mr. Redmond issued from his office-window, and aroused her from a pensive "prey on her damask cheek" reverie.

"Where to now, little gad-about?"

"Only for a ramble through the green woods, uncle."

"Let me go too?"

"I don't care, sir."

"You don't care if I *don't*, eh?"

"Ha! uncle, I don't care if you *do*! The pleasure of your company is respectfully solicited," and she dropped a stage courtesy.

They wandered down beneath the young foliage of the dark, still grove, towards the little brown chapel; and with an expression she had never before seen in his mild blue eyes, he hesitated at the little wicket and invited her to enter.

He led her to a slender grave in a retired nook of the old yard, beneath an ancient and luxuriant willow, whose long thick fringe drooped gracefully around, forming a green canopy about it. The marble slab that chronicled the death of the pale sleeper beneath was stained and darkened by

the winds and waters of many bygone years. She brushed the accumulated dust and leaves from the niches made by the sculptor's chisel, and exposed two tiny white angels, with plumed wings, smiling over a broken rose-bud. Beneath was written :

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF

EVA ELDON,

AGED NINETEEN YEARS.

Mr. Redmond watched the process of ablution silently, then sank upon the white stone. Edalia sat beside him. It was here she had designed to come when she left her home. This was the spot she had selected for her last, long rest, beside the fair young victim of a hopeless love,—fit spot, she fancied, in her sentimental sighing, for one similarly fated! Beneath, slept the mother of Walter Eldon, and above, sorrowed the destined bride of her son—if the assertion of a *bug* was to be accredited. But she enjoyed a romantic anticipation of fading prematurely away, like a young wild-rose in summer-time, and experienced no little satisfaction from the indulgence of so interesting a *denouement* of a constant heart's mournful love history!

From such lachrymal dreamings she was awakened by the inquiry:

"Do you know, Edie, the story of Eva Eldon?"

"I have heard, sir, she was the victim of a father's cupidity; that, with her heart irrevocably given to one, she was forced to bestow her hand upon another, and died, a sacrifice upon the altar of avarice."

"And who was the loved one?"

"I don't know, sir. I have been informed he left his native for a foreign land, to avoid beholding her the wife of another. It seems to me such devotion would have justified filial disobedience. Don't you think so, uncle?"

Mr. Redmond rose and examined a small blossom analytically.

"Circumstances sometimes justify seeming inconsistencies. Eva Walter's disobedience would have been unpardonable in the sight of God and man."

"Did you know the loved one, uncle?"

"I knew him well — a penniless aspirant to the heart and hand of the beautiful heiress, who has since acquired that which would have entitled him to favor in the estimation of the penurious parent — wealth and celebrity. As you know, Eva Walter was the playmate of my boyhood, and your mother's faithful friend. A recent occurrence induced me to take you to this grave, it being the most suitable spot to apprise you of a contemplated arrangement. I am pledged to the sainted sleeper beneath this stone to be a father to her orphan boy while life is granted me, and it is for you to thwart or facilitate a propitious opportunity."

He placed in her hand an open letter. She opened and read:

"RANDOLPH MACON COLLEGE, April 27, 18—.

"MY DEAR SIR:— A stray waif on the winds of time, I cross the line of minority undecided what course to pursue for the future, though the natural tendency of my mind is to jurisprudence.

"To adopt the profession of the law, as a resource in the struggle of life, I have an inclination, but would consult you with reference to the expediency of carrying into effect this contemplated purpose, before entering upon the study.

"Four years of college life may have exhausted my little patrimony, but with a heart firm to do and to dare all that is right and just, I look into the labyrinthine future with a fearless eye; and though destitute of all but native strength and firm reliance upon an overruling Power, the watchword of my heart will be, as I glance beyond the veil that drapes the battle-ground of years beyond — *onward!*

"My respectful regards to Miss E.; and hoping to be

advised by you relative to the feasibility of the plan proposed, at your earliest convenience, I am, dear sir,

Your obedient and indebted

WALTER E. ELDON.

"TO EDWARD REDMOND, Esq."

Edalia folded the missive, and returned it in silence.

"Well, Ed?"

"Well, uncle, what do you propose?"

"To receive Walter Eldon as a law-student in my office; and thereby avoid the incurrence of further pecuniary liabilities."

Edalia started, and flushed, warmly. The vexations of the first of May recurred to her mind, and she saw, in fancy, a long catalogue of similar annoyances, like land-marks upon the wayside of the future, to be combated, inevitably, under such an arrangement as that suggested.

"Well, Edalia?"

"Consult your own feelings, uncle. I beg to preserve a deferential neutrality on this point."

"Without your concurrence, my child, I shall carry into effect no plan that will operate so materially upon your domestic life. I must have your hearty acquiescence, before introducing a new member into our little home-circle. Consider the motive that prompts me to this end, and let humanity decide. Walter's circumstances are limited, and without this arrangement the remainder of his little possessions will be expended, in order to qualify him for the profession; and he will then go out penniless into an unsympathizing world, to brave the disappointments and delays incident to the opening career of a young disciple of the legal fraternity."

"I have decided, uncle; let it be as you desire, but —"

"But what, darling?"

She looked up. His generous face was all a-glow with

gratified love, and the old characteristic twinkle had resumed its sway in his smiling blue eyes, in evident anticipation of the unsaid thought.

"But I have one request, uncle, which, if granted, I shall feel no opposition to your beneficent design, and shall enter heartily into all plans that will redound to the interest of Walter."

"Granted before heard, Ed; name it, dear."

"Then, sir, never advert to that foolish affair associated with the month of May, and heathenish superstition, and I am ready to receive and regard Walter as a dear friend, and *brother*."

He took her in his arms, and kissed her forehead.

"My child, your happiness is my first care, and whatever hopes I may cherish for you in the future, relative to matters of affinity, I shall never essay to bias or constrain you in affairs of the heart. I leave you free to act, only hoping my darling girl may not commit the grand error of many of her sex — *mistake romantic passion for genuine love*."

He spoke this with an emphasis that recalled it to memory long years after, when she had learned to comprehend its import.

And so it ended. They turned from the old hushed garden of the dead, and wended homeward, in a gorgeous sunset of richest crimson and gold, and a sweet breeze refreshingly astir on the fragrant evening air.

Mr. Belmont and Bertha, sunken-eyed and emaciated, drove up to the low brown house with the long piazza, as Mr. Redmond and Edalia emerged from the deep grove into the highway. The two girls uttered a glad cry, and sprang into each other's arms. Uncle Ned rubbed his hands, and chuckled.

CHAPTER XV.

BERTHA TAKES FRENCH LEAVE OF THE SEMINARY.

THERE was confusion at La Violet Seminary. Miss Belmont was missing, and the alarm was sounded throughout the Institution. The three boarders (all that the establishment could boast) gathered up in the attic and whispered over the mysterious disappearance of their late "fellow-sufferer." Bertha had *run away*, they felt confident, but they dared not breathe it aloud. They wished themselves as "well off" as the daring one, if she were not captured and brought back. The young trio did not know what recent additional provocation their late companion had received to incite her to this bold act.

Bertha was sick — too sick to descend to the school-room; mentally and physically, she was wholly unfit for study. Our heroine had grown thin to emaciation. Her health, delicate from early childhood, had been wholly uncared for by those to whom her fond father had intrusted her, and her deathly white face and faded eyes sadly betrayed their neglect. Then, too, she was heart-sick with hope deferred, longing to hear from the loved ones at home. Day after day she had waited and yearned for the letters she *knew* had come; for Mr. Belmont was Postmaster, and no delay from careless officials would keep her waiting in vain. But day after day dragged wearily on, and no loving words came from the dear ones afar to cheer her wretched state. Bertha was fast verging upon desperation, ripe for any rash act, when she saw Mr. Wetter, the Postmaster, in close conversation with Dr. Browzer, the day of her elopement. She felt an intuitive conviction that *she* had been the subject of

such earnest discussion, when Mrs. Browzer, with a mysterious smile upon her yellow face, informed Rena and Madge that Mr. Wetter had "come to consult the doctor upon a point of law." Our heroine had quick perceptions; she read the silent language of the glances interchanged between the three. Bertha went up to her gloomy and bare attic with a sickness at heart that she had never realized before. She saw her situation was hopeless, unless she relied upon her own bravery and cunning to improve it. Should she *run away*? Her pride revolted at the suggestion, and a thought of Mrs. Wilmer's malicious tongue held her undecided. But then, human nature could not endure such imposition and misery much longer. She should die there, without speedy relief, like the poor girl of whom Angeline Daveling had informed her — die there, in that dismal den, among unfeeling, cruel strangers, and never behold her dear parents and brother again! She wrung her small hands in an agony. If she could get a letter to some one, she might be rescued; but that was impossible — she was wholly in the power of soulless, mercenary wretches. Even Edalia had not responded; doubtless her letter had been read by her persecutors. Bertha knew her father would visit her, without some satisfaction from the Seminary; but suspense was killing her — she should not live till he arrived. She went to the puny looking-glass, that served the boarders for a mirror, and examined her face. It was sunken and sallow, and great blue rings surrounded her heavy eyes. She was walking the floor in a state of distraction, the bitter tears streaming down her cheeks, when Mrs. Browzer entered the attic-chamber and ordered her to go immediately to the school-room.

Our heroine sobbingly assured her she was "too sick and miserable — it was impossible for her to study. Please excuse her to-day."

Mrs. Browzer would "do no such thing. It was her duty to see that Miss Belmont improved her time," (Bertha wished she would be as careful of duty in other respects,) "she would not have such foolishness about her; she ought to be ashamed of such childish conduct." (Bertha thought Mrs. Browzer ought to be ashamed of the meanness of intercepting letters.)

Rena now entered to second her mother, which she did in such sharp terms that Mrs. Browzer reproved her gently for her language.

Rena "could n't help it, mother; she was so disgusted to see a grown young lady (our heroine was sixteen — in appearance not more than twelve) conduct herself in this manner. She ought to be *made* to behave herself, and go down to the Academy."

Rena flounced out of the room, with a scowl upon her brow, and her stinging words rankling in a yearning and deeply suffering heart. If Rena and her mother had uttered kind and sympathizing words, the poor heart would have been comforted, and better prepared for duty; and the reputation of their Seminary would not have suffered by an act to which their heartlessness impelled our heroine.

Mrs. Browzer soon followed her frowning offspring, with the authoritative declaration that Bertha "*should go*," and commanded her, imperatively, to "prepare herself for the school-room instantly!"

Bertha looked at her as she went out, with haughty head high up, and ribbons fluttering from her cap, and wondered if that woman had any *soul*? She thought it possible that a just and righteous God might have created some human forms destitute of an immortal principle, knowing, in His infinite wisdom, they would be damned eternally if He favored them with a spark of divinity.

Bertha only partially obeyed Mrs. Browzer — she *went*,

but not to the school-room. She went from her dark, cold, miserable attic in the direction indicated by her tormentor, and she never returned. Her indecision was ended — her purpose was fixed. She would have died in the woods, sooner than return to that place of torment.

Bertha Belmont was a timid, retiring girl — easily led by love, but not to be driven by harshness. Her sense of honor rendered her obstinate, when dealt with unjustly; but through her affections, she was pliant and yielding as wax. She was too quiet and reserved to be easily read. Her modest, gentle deportment gave the impression of cowardly weakness, until meanness developed her latent powers. As she had written to Edalia, she “despised *meanness*,” and she “*could not* live without love.” Mrs. Browzer had thought to frighten her into subjection. She discovered her error when too late to repair it.

Bertha went *around* the Academy, instead of *into* it. It was not an unusual route for the girls, and she escaped observation. She went on and on soberly, until a friendly hedge shut her out from the prison she had left forever; then her sober pace quickened into surprising velocity. On and on she flew, she knew not whither — she only thought of escape from the lion’s den. Our brave heroine scrambled over a worm fence, and found herself in the black rim of woods that had so long shut her in from the feeling world. She breathed freer, but slackened not her pace — she was yet too near the dreaded Institution.

Bertha was on the point of congratulating herself upon her escape, when — horror of horrors! — she found she had lost a prized jewel, containing a lock of precious hair, and her feet lost their swiftness — her heart sank like lead in her panting bosom. She could not proceed without an effort to regain it. Night was coming on, and the woods looked dark and gloomy, but our heroine’s spirit was too strong to suc-

cumb to slight difficulties. Bertha turned to retrace her steps in search of the lost treasure. She had been taught from babyhood to trust in an overruling Providence, and to pray to "Our Father, who art in heaven;" and the strongest and most comprehensive language she could command came from her heart as she petitioned the Lord to "prosper her way." Bertha had well-nigh despaired of success, because of the thicket through which she had passed, and was on the point of abandoning the search, when her eyes fell upon the prized jewel half hidden in dry leaves. She grasped it eagerly, and her small feet flew onward with a strength and swiftness that would have astonished one who beheld her little, sickly-looking form. Bertha had lost time to make up, and she made it with deeper gratitude in her palpitating heart, than she had ever felt in her life before. On and on she went through the wild woods, firmly believing the Lord would lead her right, since He had providentially returned her treasure. Finally she struck into a pig-path — she knew not where it might lead, but she followed it; there was surely a habitation not far distant. A stately residence at length shone through the trees, and an old negro in an ox-cart eyed her narrowly as she followed the pig-path.

Earnestly as she longed for rest and shelter, our heroine had not one thought of seeking it in the wealthy-looking mansion. It reminded her of Mrs. Wilmer's home, and she felt a secret conviction she would find no sympathy there. She knew not how far she had come from the hated Seminary; perhaps this was one of the Browzer associates, who would send her back, if she applied there for protection. She quickened her steps to widen the distance between her and the aristocratic residence. The little path led into the highway. She looked around her on all sides with mortal fear lest she should encounter the Doctor or Mr. Wetter. Either would have been fatal.

Bertha longed for one glimpse of an humble-looking house — a low brown house with a long piazza, would have overjoyed her anxious heart. She did not believe all the rich to be destitute of sympathy and human kindness: Mr. Redmond and Dr. Montrose were shining exceptions. Neither did she think all the poor were generous and good: Dr. Browzer's family were sufficient proofs to the contrary. But in her friendless and forlorn condition, our heroine would rather trust to an humble home for comfort and security. And such a home now presented itself to her faded brown eyes. Bertha approached it fearlessly, with a presentiment of good.

A mild-eyed, matronly woman received her kindly, and listened to the story our heroine related, with evident sympathy in her motherly eyes.

"Poor thing!" were her first words, as the young girl ended the tale of her wrongs and sufferings at the Seminary, and asked for shelter and protection.

Our heroine's firmness deserted her at the voice of kindness, — she broke completely down, and cried for very joy. A feeling of *home*, so long a stranger to her heart, came over her warmly at the motherly sound.

Mrs. Davin soothed her with true womanly kindness, and Bertha grew calm and strong beneath the reviving influence of a sympathizing soul. The good lady promised her protection, until Mr. Belmont could be advised of her situation.

CHAPTER XVI.

PROVIDENCE SMILES ON OUR HEROINE.

THE Davin family, to whose care a kind Providence had led our friendless and homeless heroine, consisted of five members — parents, two children, a son and daughter, and a young grandson, whose mother, the daughter of Bertha's kind friends, slept quietly beneath the green coverlet of Spring.

Mr. Davin was a generous-hearted, humorous man, of much wealth and little show. Bertha was surprised to find there were far greater riches in the unassuming home she had chosen than in the stately mansion she had shunned. She learned also that the inmates of that imposing residence were associates of the Browzer family, who would, undoubtedly, have returned her to her den, had she applied to them for protection. Like the Browzers, they were people who made a desperate effort to "keep up appearances," and such persons invariably possess a lean soul. People of fallen fortunes, arising from extravagance or intemperance, starve the mind to tinsel the body; while honorable persons in reduced circumstances accommodate themselves to their condition, and wear an exterior corresponding with their depleted purse. Bertha shuddered at the bare thought of the great house, with its superficial occupants that she had providentially shunned.

Dr. Davin, the son, had but recently returned from college. His manly, generous face bore ample testimony to his relationship with the noble woman who had received and comforted our unhappy, absconded heroine. His mild blue eyes filled with sympathizing tears as he listened silently to

the story of the poor girl's sufferings at the Seminary rehearsed by Mrs. Davin. Bertha felt sure of protection from her enemies, as she looked upon the firm, yet feeling face of the true-hearted young doctor.

But for one circumstance, which remains to be revealed in the future, our young heroine's grateful and susceptible heart would have remained in the home of her newly found friends, when her wasted form and wan face had passed from it forever. But Bertha Belmont was not one to change easily. Love with her was not merely one of life's incidents, but the epoch of an existence.

Lily Davin was her brother's peer, and worthy of her parentage. Lily had been a pupil at the Seminary, and could vouch for Bertha's veracity from actual experience. Bertha learned more of the Browzer antecedents and surroundings, and the reputation of their Seminary, than she had known when she assumed the responsibility of taking French leave of it. Providence could not have directed her to a better or more desirable refuge, than the unassuming home of the wealthy family, who scorned superficial show, and hypocritical pretenders. Bertha also found she had run two miles through wild, strange woods, to escape the cruelties of a fashionable boarding-school.

They were on the eve of retiring the first night of Bertha's uncereemonious introduction to the amiable family, when a loud fist-knock at the door of the country home, summoned Mr. Davin; and our heroine caught the words from the new-comer:

"Is ye got ary strange young leddy wid ye, massy?"

Bertha's face grew whiter — her faith failed her, momentarily; but a glance at her friends reassured her.

The old negro, sent out from the Seminary in search of the missing pupil, followed Mr. Davin to the parlor-door, and poked his black head through to observe Bertha.

"Yes, sah; dat's de young leddy, *shore!* Done run off 'bout two 'clock frum de Sem'na' fur sart'n, massy! We niggers bin lookin' arter 'er ever sense school broke, sah; mighty big fuss up dare 'bout 'er, fur *shore!*"

His white eyes and teeth shone brightly, with a broad, satisfied smile.

Bertha did not recognize the old man, but she requested him to inform her *friends* at the Institution that she was both safe and well, and to feel no further concern about her, for she would never return to the Seminary alive. The old negro responded:

"Yes, Miss, I'll tell 'em dat same. I's mighty glad I done foun' ye, honey, fur *shore!*" He ducked his black head, and pulled his forelock respectfully, and smilingly disappeared.

Bertha slept sweetly under Mr. Davin's hospitable roof that night, with a heart full of gratitude to God for the friends He had raised up to her in a time of sorest need, and a fervent prayer upon her pale lips for those dear, kind friends.

Next morning early, Dr. Browzer presented himself at Mr. Davin's, and requested an interview with his late pupil. Bertha trembled universally as Mr. Davin informed her of the visitor's desire. She had not anticipated this; she now feared being taken, *vi et armis*, back to the hated Seminary, and begged to decline the interview.

"Don't you be afraid, child," said the good old man; "he shan't take you out o' my house, while I'm in it, by jing! Nobody shall have you against your will, till your father comes, as sure's you're born. I'll see you through all right — by the land!"

Thus encouraged, our heroine accompanied her protector into the visitor's presence.

Dr. Browzer received her politely and even kindly; and

rallied her upon her surreptitious departure from his premises. He endeavored to convince her of the impropriety of the step she had taken, and to prevail upon her to return with him.

Bertha firmly declined the urgent invitation, and gave her objections to his proposition, bravely supported by the proximity of smiling Mr. Davin.

Dr. Browzer could not controvert her assertions, but essayed to invalidate her arguments by adverting to her imperilled reputation, (Bertha wondered if he did not mean *his*,) — he affirmed *that* should be a sufficient incentive to duty, even at the sacrifice of a little personal feeling.

Our heroine smiled at the word "*duty*," so religiously recommended to her by those who had neglected it themselves. She seriously doubted if it were her "*duty*" to sacrifice happiness and life solely to advance the interest of those who had trampled upon principle, and thought only of profit.

Bertha informed him she "was entirely willing to risk the consequences of the step she had taken. To remain at the Seminary would be of no benefit to her whatever, as her wretched health rendered it impossible for her to make any advancement in her studies. She could not live through the session without some care for her present condition."

Dr. Browzer's diplomacy had failed signally, and he now changed his tactics. He advised her "to accompany him to the Institution, and he would inform her father of her declining health and desire to return home. As Mr. Belmont had confided her to his care, it was proper that he should return her to him."

Bertha smiled in her sleeve, and wondered "if her face" was so simple as to induce the supposition that she could be entrapped by such a bait. She was surprised that a man of his age should angle in clear water, without being particularly careful to conceal his hook!

She "preferred remaining in her present home until her father came, as she found it more pleasant than the one she had left. Had her letters been received by her friends, she would not have been subjected to the necessity of leaving the Seminary secretly. Perhaps the mails might fail to carry his letter to her father, as they had hers; and in such an event she would be better content among her new-found friends."

Dr. Browzer winced, but yielded the point at discretion. His late pupil was incorrigible, and safely intrenched behind friends more powerful, in every respect, than himself. He remained to breakfast, and departed, unregretted by all he left behind. He promised Mr. Davin to convey intelligence to Mr. Belmont.

The good old man applauded her bravery, and laughed at the Doctor's defeat. The kind family enjoyed the scene enacted by the proprietor of La Violet Seminary and his invulnerable pupil of former days, reproduced by its facetious head, for their amusement, with characteristic humor.

They were peaceful, pleasant days our heroine passed in the home to which a merciful Providence had directed her. She was no longer pinched with hunger and frozen with heartless indifference; but it was long months ere she recovered from the effects of a heart left to desolation. Her whole nature was love, and without its healthful influence she would soon wither and die.

Mr. Belmont was startled by the ravages of disease made in the appearance of his daughter by a few weeks' experience in a "fashionable boarding-school." Bertha thought heaven had come down to earth when she found herself once more in the safety-ark of her father's arms.

Dr. Davin accompanied Mr. Belmont to the Seminary upon his arrival at Bertha's refuge, and was besieged by Lily upon his return.

Dr. Davin was a quiet, amiable man, with a keen sense of the ludicrous underlying a calm, dignified exterior. His cool, undemonstrative manner of relating an incident gave double point to a sarcastic thought.

"Did you enter the Institution?" inquired Lily, with a sparkle in her mild eye as it looked into her brother's.

"No;" laying his head back with a queer expression about his manly mouth; "we preferred the porch,—the evening was fine."

"Then you did n't see the ladies?" said Lily.

"Oh, yes," — caressing his firm mouth with finger and thumb to smooth out an incipient smile; "they honored us with their presence upon the porch, and also gave us an invitation from the key-board to enter the parlor, which the balmy air induced us to decline. Splendid piece it was, though; I saw Fanny Ellsler dance it in Philadelphia."

"What was it?"

"The Cachuca."

"Then you heard Madge talk, of course?"

"I did."

"What did she say?" laughed Lily.

"She said," laying his head back and turning up his eyes, soberly, "'Oh, what a beautiful night we are going to have! The moon begins to shed its influence already!'"

"Why that was simplicity's self to Madge's usual style," said Lily, with a merry laugh.

"Yes, but the loud, rostrum tone and manner in which it was declaimed rendered it graceful and grandiloquent." The incipient smile leaped into full birth upon the young doctor's handsome mouth, and his fine blue eyes expressed volumes of unspoken thought, more amusing to the observer than the oral language.

"She talked like a lawyer," said Mr. Belmont, alluding to Mrs. Browzer; "I' faith, one would think from her tone

of injured innocence that my daughter was the most ungrateful imp alive to desert such a delightful home and loving friends as she found at the Seminary! I should think so, judging from her appearance!" he growled, indignantly.

Bertha bade adieu to her kind friends with genuine regret, and left the vicinity of her late purgatory with no lingering desire ever to behold it again. Dr. Davin accompanied them some miles on their homeward route, and they said farewell for many long years.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Redmond, as the story ended, "and so we'll have the blue-eyed *Æsculapius* fluttering around here before shortly,—I'll bet two chincapins, by Jupiter!"

Bertha blushed painfully; the crimson flush mantled both cheek and brow, and even tinged her small ears. Her confusion was so apparent that it communicated itself to the observer, and the old man's kind heart assisted her to recover from the overwhelming effect of his badinage. He never alluded to the doctor again in Bertha's presence. Her extreme sensibility at her tender age surprised him.

"I say, Ed," said Mr. Redmond, as they wended homeward, "Bertha's in love, and my jig's up — by Jupiter!"

Edalia laughed at the serio-comic expression of his face; she knew he was jesting with his gray hairs.

"I really believe so, uncle; but I seriously doubt if it's with the doctor."

"Who the deuce then?"

"Esquire Redmond, perhaps."

"Get out!" he snarled, with a queer compression of the softened mouth.

"He, he!" giggled Dora Wilmer, "Bertha Belmont's run away — he, he!"

Dora had dropped in at Dr. Montrose's the evening subsequent to our heroine's return home. Minnie snapped out,

regardless of her visitor's feelings and politeness under her own roof:

"Yes, and you would have done the same, if you had the bravery that Bert's got!"

Dora was so chagrined at this well-merited rebuke, that she burst into tears like an angry child, and flitted out to the carriage, with the terrible threat that she'd "tell her ma!"

"I don't care if she never comes again," said indignant Minnie to the gratified Edalia; — "she's got no soul, anyhow, and the whole family's just so, setting aside the Colonel. *He's* worth the whole tribe, (and goodness knows there're enough of them!) All they possess in the round world is in their pocket — they have n't anything in their heads, the Lord knows! They're stingy as sin, and all you hear in their houses is 'money' and 'Thomsonian medicine'!"

Edalia laughed outright; and Mr. Redmond, with a jerk of one leg to shake down his trousers, said, with a chuckle:

"They may say what they please of Bert, I glory in her spunk — by Jupiter!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WALTER ELDON'S ADVENT. — EDALIA'S DREAM.

IT was a busy day at Mr. Redmond's. There was the little chamber adjoining the old man's to prepare for Walter, and Aunt Cora bustled about, brimful of importance and satisfaction.

"Lor' bless yer heart, honey! I ain't bin so glad I dunno when! Mars Wallie was ollers sich a nice boy.

Four years is a mighty long time. I 'spect 'e won't hardly know old Aunt Cory what used fur ter steal biscuits out 'n the oven fur you an' him 'fore they was good an' done. Lor' bless 'is blue eyes! Aunt Cory ain't furgot 'im yit — how 'e used fur ter buy 'er terbacker when she had n't a blessed red cent ter he'p 'erse'f wid. He's pine blank like 's mother, too; an' 'e's boun' ter come ter some good. Boys as favors their mothers is born ter good luck. I ollers knowed it — an' now 'e's gwine ter be a big lawyer — ki!" and Aunt Cora scrubbed industriously the little chamber-floor until a spot of tarnish would have been a phenomenon.

Recent events had rendered Edalia inquisitive on some points relative to Walter's parents, that she had heretofore been regardless of, and she inquired:

"Tell me of Walter's father, aunty,— where did he die?"

"Lor' bless yer heart, honey, he ain't dead yit, not's I knows on — 'cep' brandy's carred 'im off! He used fur ter be a mighty hard drinker in Miss Evy's day; an' arter she died, po' thing, he jes' turned out an' drunk an' gambled all 'is fortin away, an' then *he* went, too,— the Lord in heab'n knows whar,— I don't. He used fur ter be a mighty rich man, when Miss Evy marred 'im — rich as Kresus — an' a pooty man 'e was, too. But Miss Evy did n't want 'im — she had ter have 'im, though — po' thing!"

"Why did she have to, aunty?"

"I dunno, honey. Some folks ses how 'er pa fooled 'er 'bout bein' broke, an' ef she did n't have Mr. Eldon 'e'd kill 'isself. But I dunno nothin' 'bout it, honey, on'y she pined 'way arter it, an' died when Mars Wallie was a little baby — po' thing!"

Walter's father yet living! Here was a mystery; and Edalia resolved, with a spirit of newly awakened curiosity, to probe it to the bottom. She knew the early history of Walter,— that her own sainted mother had adopted him,

after the death of Mrs. Eldon; and when she became an orphan, they both passed under the guardianship of Mr. Redmond; but Edalia had been taught to regard him as a fatherless boy.

The dreaded day at length dawned — a clear, blue September morning, dreamy and languid with the faint breath of fading flowers, and the low hum of golden-winged bees, sunning and sipping the nectar-drops in the consumptive hearts of autumn blossoms. It waned slowly, and “now came still evening on, and twilight gray had, in her sober livery, all things clad.”

The finishing touch had been given to Walter's chamber, — for Edalia prided herself on her housekeeping qualities, so frequently commended by her uncle, — and they sat at the parlor-window, looking out for the carriage, and listening to catch the distant rumble of its revolving wheels, as it bore Walter homeward from Enfield.

Edalia said, quietly:

“Adopting the language of Joseph to his brethren, allow me to ask, uncle, ‘doth Walter's father yet live’?”

He turned upon her a searching glance.

“And why this inquiry now, Ed?”

“I have casually learned, sir, that his death is problematical.”

Edalia detected a lurking smile in his large blue eyes, and grew warm in consequence. He answered:

“I can give you no positive assurance, but the prevailing belief founded upon circumstantial evidence, is, that Walter's father has long filled an inebriate's grave.”

Edalia forbore further interrogations.

“Hit 's cummin', master!” shouted little Dick, springing through the gate, and turning a somerset on the green grass; then hurling his wool hat aloft, he caught it on his

toes, and shot off to enlighten the occupants of the kitchen department.

Mr. Redmond hurried out as the vehicle drew up, and received the descending form of a tall young man in his extended arms. Edalia wondered at such manifest affection.

Aunt Cora poked her black head, enveloped in a snow-white 'kerchief with a tremendous bow in front, into the parlor as the two gentlemen advanced, and whispered, excitedly :

"Lor' bless yer heart, honey, how 'e is growed! — taller'n marster 'e is — ki!" and she made a precipitate exit, as footsteps sounded on the piazza, and voices came floating up.

Edalia rose, as her uncle entered the apartment, and stood face to face with Walter Eldon, after a separation of four years; but what a change had those four years wrought!

He advanced smilingly and with extended hand; Edalia had thought to welcome him with sisterly feeling and frankness, but an indefinable emotion possessed her, as she looked up into those full and fathomless blue eyes, and she received him with dignified restraint, shrinking instinctively from the soft touch of his lips upon her forehead.

Mr. Redmond dropped into his old arm-chair, with a *nonchalance* that indicated perfect satisfaction with himself, "all the world, and the rest of mankind;" while Walter took possession of one hard by, designated by the forefinger of the old gentleman; and Edalia stole out to superintend the tea-board.

She was busily employed thereat, when, looking up, she observed the tall form of the young man towering in the doorway, his earnest eyes bent, half mournfully, upon her flushed face. He went slowly up to her and extended his hand. She laid hers nervously upon the soft, warm palm, and his fingers closed gently but firmly around it.

"Miss Redmond! — shall I address you by that cold and formal title?"

"No, no! call me, as in the years gone by, Walter. Why should we not be as then?"

"There is no cause for change, Edalia; but your cool reception and reserved air inspired the fear that change had come over one — but not *my* heart."

"Nor mine, Walter. I have ever, and shall always cherish for you the affection of a sister."

His clasp suddenly tightened and relaxed as if involuntarily; then gently releasing her hand, he stood in momentary silence with folded arms.

Edalia had never seen him look so handsome. His curling chestnut-hair, changing and glittering in the lamplight, was swept gracefully back, from a broad, high, and delicately white forehead, the veined purity of which a city belle might have envied. The pink of the sea-shell mantled his cheeks — once round, but now evincing the unwearied student; and his eyes — those large, soft blue eyes, comparable to nought but the liquid heavens of a clear, mellow sunset in balmy June — were expressive of sunshine and shadows commingled in the depths of the soul.

"Thank you, Edalia — dear *sister*; whatever fate has in store for us in years that may come, — whatever separate relations we may bear in the dim future, — may the unfading freshness of our happy and confiding childhood days ever be the one green spot in memory's waste."

He turned to go, as Aunt Cora entered with both hands well laden with tea-service, which she hastened to put down in order to grasp his proffered hand.

"God bless ye, Mass Wallie! I's so glad I dunno what ter do, ter see ye back safe an' sound ergin! Lor' bless yer heart, honey, I ain't eat nuthin' in a week hardly, was so full o' glad ter think ye was comin' back! But I gwine ter

make up for los' time ter-night, though — 'deed I is, honey!" and she wiped her wet eyes with the corner of her check apron.

Walter's eyes moistened as he listened to the expressions of delight from the faithful and affectionate old servant, and replying to her artless demonstrations to her entire satisfaction and admiration, he hurried away.

Aunt Cora poured out, to her young mistress, profuse praise of the "dear, pooty boy."

Dr. Montrose, Minnie, Charles Chester, and Bertha Belmont gathered around the cheerful hearth of Mr. Redmond that night. All was mirthful and gay, save the hidden heart that wildly throbbed beneath the dark bodice of silently suffering Edalia.

A song was called for. Walter led Miss Redmond to the piano; Charles tossed the blue ribbon of the guitar over the bright brown curls of his affianced, and gallant Uncle Ned escorted our heroine to the melodeon. They played and sang in concert, the gentlemen supplying a deep, rich bass.

Mr. Redmond laid his hand jocosely upon Walter's shoulder, as the music ceased and the performers rose.

"Come, sir, we wait your lordship's favor. A young gentleman fresh from Randolph, deficient in such an essential accomplishment, ought to be arrested on the ground of false pretences, and deprived of his blazing diploma!"

With a mysterious smile, the young man turned silently, and walked deliberately to the piano. To the infinite surprise of all, and the delight of Mr. Redmond, he dashed off a simple prelude with graceful accuracy, and sang to an accompaniment the sweet and plaintive air, "Oft in the stilly night." As the last note died softly away, Mr. Redmond queried:

"Where learned you this science, young man?"

Walter glanced mischievously up:

"At college, sir."

"The deuce you did! And the teacher wore boots and whiskers, we are to understand?"

"No, sir;

'A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command.'"

"Ah! you young scapegrace! — been falling in love, eh?"

A wave of crimson rolled over the young man's face, and rippled off under the rings of nut-brown hair, leaving his face pale and inflexible as marble.

Minnie gave Edalia a sorrowful glance, which she returned with a glad smile.

A shadow rested upon Mr. Redmond's brow as the "good night" was uttered, and Edalia went up to her chamber.

Di rolled herself up on the hearth-rug, and very speedily a heavy sound issued from the heap that assured her young mistress of her utter obliviousness; and Edalia — the petted child of fortune — envied the poor slave, so humble and ignorant.

The hot blood burned in her veins, and her brain throbbed. There was no necessity for restraint now, and she threw herself on the bed and burst into a passion of tears. She wept long and freely, till the footsteps of her uncle and Walter, ascending the stairs, roused her, and she rose to prepare for the night.

Mr. Redmond had evidently recovered his wonted cheerfulness; he chatted gayly with his companion as they passed, and his merry laugh grew distant as the chamber-door shut them in.

As Edalia bound back the long black ringlets with which nature had crowned her, from her swollen eyes and flushed face, a queer smile came over the features reflected in the

mirror before her. Her eyes had fallen upon a little dressing-case, the gift of Mr. Redmond on her seventeenth birthday. It was composed of rosewood banded with pearl, cushioned with crimson velvet, and surmounted by a pure, white, transparent shell, on which glistened the golden initials W. E.; and she smiled at the prediction of the bug-oracle, now that she felt there was a duplicate barrier to its fulfilment. A secret spring revealed a tiny cell, containing a sealed missive, addressed "To Edalia Redmond, my darling niece," and was disclosed to her with the words:

"Promise me, Edie, that you will never possess the secret herein contained until I am no more, or grant you permission."

"*I do promise, uncle.*"

"Enough, my child; I confide implicitly in your integrity."

A wayward spirit now possessed Edalia, and she lifted it from its hiding-place. Did it concern her? She would have given much in her restless state to read the secret story; but the memory of her sainted mother, and her early teachings, "Thou God seest me," as she knelt in infancy at her knee, with her loving hand upon her little head, came over the yearning child, and she dared not violate the vow. She returned the letter to the little case, and retired to rest. She slept and dreamed: She wandered with Minnie on the verge of a frightful precipice. Flowers of richest hue and luxuriance bloomed profusely around, and the atmosphere was heavy with perfume. Bird-songs drifted on waves of sunny air, and echoed in the dark wild cavern below. A blossom of rare beauty attracted her eye, and she leaned over to gather it from the side of the chasm. Minnie bounded forward, and merrily plucked it from beneath her hand; but the fang of a serpent was thrust into her delicate finger as she snapped the slender stem. Faint with pain

and fright, Minnie tottered over the awful steep! Edalia grasped her arm as she descended, and falling upon the frightful verge, held her light form suspended in mid-air, and screamed in agony and horror.

She knew not from whence he came, but a strong arm was thrown firmly around her, and Walter Eldon drew them both from the frightful gulf!

Edalia awoke, and started up with a shudder. It was morning — clear, calm, and sun-bright.

She made a hasty toilet, and descended to the parlor. Mr. Redmond received her with his usual morning salute. His round, rubicund face was radiant with good-humor, and his big blue eyes were brimful of sparkles.

“Just as I insinuated, Ed; the boy is six feet in love, sure enough! and now we’ll have a wedding by-and-by, and the deuce will be to pay! Kiss her, Wall,—she’s only a *sister*, you know.”

Edalia submitted quietly to the process, and felt his lips quiver slightly, as he pressed them warmly upon her cheek. Did he fancy he wronged the loved one far away?

CHAPTER XVIII.

MINNIE’S BRIDAL.—SHE “SOWETH THE WIND.”

IT was the bridal eve of Minnie Montrose. The heavens were dull and leaden-hued, and a drizzling rain made mist-wreaths upon the window-panes, as Edalia Redmond stood alone in her chamber, looking at the illuminated mansion. She was repeating, mentally, the lines of poor Byron —

“And fiends might pity what I feel,
To know that thou art lost forever!”

as an expression of her own sensations, when the door opened and widow Wilmer entered.

Edalia and Bertha were among the six chosen bridesmaids, and the fair widow had kindly volunteered to preside at the toilet of Mr. Redmond's niece.

Widow Wilmer was a handsome woman of thirty-three, reduced in circumstances through the intemperance of her lost liege, and the mother of five badly disciplined responsibilities. The fair widow was amiable outwardly, with a leaning towards the rich that rendered her often unjust to the poor when the two came in contact, and charity demanded an equal distribution of her favors; and rumor whispered the wealthy got more than their share. She coveted praise, and gave alms to receive it; but those who penetrated beneath the surface of mere seeming, were reminded of St. Paul's declaration, “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” She was related to the “money,” and “Thomsonian medicine” tribe, but an old feud had long separated the relatives. She was sly and supercilious, with a shining tissue of sanctimony thrown over to soften her salient points. Bertha Belmont had *felt* the distinction the fair widow made between the favored of fortune and the poor in purse.

Judging from various womanly wiles and gentle arts, Mrs. Wilmer would willingly have borne to Edalia Redmond the interesting relationship of aunt, could her confirmed old bachelor uncle have been induced to “see it in that light.”

Edalia had often wondered at his predilection for single blessedness, but no banterings thereupon could elicit aught pertaining to the past, or reveal the curtained mysteries of the soul's inner sanctuary.

Edalia stood passively as the long black ringlets drifted one by one from the white fingers of the smiling widow, and floated in inky waves over her neck and shoulders. The delicate snowy wreath was twined above cheeks scarcely less white, and the sacrifice was prepared.

Walter looked earnestly into the young girl's eyes, as they ascended to the bridal chamber.

"Are you ill, Edalia?"

"No — thank you." —

Minnie was radiant with smiles and blushes, and Charles looked statély and triumphant, as he stood in the midst of that brilliant and gay assembly, and vowed eternal love and protection to the fragile form that, dove-like, trembled at his side. The seal of the marital compact was set upon her rosy, smiling lips, and Minnie Montrose was merged into the life and destiny of Charles Chester.

Peterroy Simpkins' round form at length became visible among the crowd, enveloped in a bran new suit of the latest Broadway "agony." He advanced toward Walter, who stood beside Edalia and Bertha, with a most graceful inclination of his little shiny head, and drew off a delicate white kid with sovereign grace and ecstasy.

"Mr. Eldon, I have the supreme felicity and honor of extending this palm of unequivocal friendship, after the lapse of many successive annual rotations. Permit me, sir, to express my unfeigned emotions of gratification for the inestimable privilege of welcoming you back from a remote citadel of inculcation, after your temporary sojourn with all the pristine genuineness of adolescence; for verily, sir, *vera amicitia est sempiterna*. — I have recently, sir, revelled in the rainbow radiance of sublime Niagara, with its organ tones and startling splendor, and perambulated the labyrinthine aisles of babel Gotham, or it would have been my delightful prerogative, ere this enchanting hour, to vociferate my

enthusiastic desire for the renewal of long dormant associations of amity."

The little lord drew himself up with a regal air, as he concluded his eloquent declaration, and deigned an acknowledgment of Edalia's presence by a slight and supercilious shake of his systematically arranged curls.

He had evidently not forgiven her rejection of the honor he would so condescendingly have conferred upon her.

Mirth and music floated from many a ruby lip; "the merry dance went round, and joy was unconfined." The sparkling wine painted a brighter rose upon youthful cheeks, and lent unusual lustre to beaming eyes.

A goblet of crimson liquid deepened and flashed in the hands of the happy bridegroom.

"A health to the beautiful bride!" echoed many voices, as he placed it untasted upon the board.

"No! I've forsworn the sparkling bowl!—it is easier to resist than reform. 'Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.'"

A peal of merriment greeted this remark. Charles stood calm and unaffected; but the rich blood mounted to Minnie's brow, and she placed the glass in the hand of the bridegroom with an inviting smile!

Edalia and Bertha exchanged reproachful glances, and observed Walter start, slightly. He bent over and said, lowly, but earnestly:

"Charles, beware!"

The bridegroom turned to his adviser.

"Years have passed since I drank of the fruit of the vine, but I obey the behest of my fair bride."

Walter grew white as the glass sent up its empty, silvery ring, as Charles replaced it upon the board. The two girls caught the low sad voice of Walter, as they turned away, whispering in the ear of the smiling bride:

“‘He that soweth the wind, shall reap the whirlwind!’”

A shadow flitted over her young face, and she threw after him a wistful, remorseful glance.

Peter stepped forward, his cheeks flushed to an unnatural brilliancy, and all the dignity of Chesterfield thick upon his squat person.

“Mr. Eldon, the honor of a glass with you.”

“Pray exonerate me, Mr. Simpkins; my total abstinence principles must be my apology.”

Peter “grew small by degrees, and beautifully less,” as he shrank back among the gay group.

Edalia caught the eye of Charles Chester at the close of the evening. It was bright and burning, and a spot of crimson glowed on either cheek.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DESERTED HOMESTEAD. — MISS AGNES BENTLEY. —
MINNIE “REAPS THE WHIRLWIND.”

WINTER passed quietly away, and with it Mr. Belmont and family. Mr. Belmont received an urgent call to the Williamsville Academy—the place of our heroine’s nativity—and joyfully Mrs. Belmont prepared to abandon the low brown house with the long piazza. It passed into the hands of a Wilmer.

Bertha was now seventeen, and very beautiful; child-like, in her delicate proportions; the admiration of the opposite sex, and envy of her own. Mr. Belmont procured her an elegant piano—much handsomer and finer-toned than Mrs. Wilmer’s highly-prized instrument;—and though destitute of a teacher, Bertha’s perseverance, together with

Minnie's and Edalia's kindness, had rendered our heroine far superior to Dora as a performer, when she bade adieu to the low brown house with the long piazza, and went back, half sorrowfully, to the place of her birth.

Bertha yearned to see more of the wide world she had caught a glimpse of in the clouded mirror of romances and through the clearer microscope of the many journals and specimen copies of magazines that crowded her father's office, and which she had devoured with avidity; but the pleasurable anticipations of exchanging a quiet country life for one more alive with interest and excitement, amid the changing panorama of every-day experience, were saddened by the reflection of a necessary separation from her two young friends — Minnie Chester and Edalia Redmond.

They wandered through the gold- and crimson-crowned October woods, and talked over the coming separation; speculating upon Bertha's future, out in the great, gay world; and under the old maple, by the little spring, where so many bright, happy hours of childhood had been passed, they made solemn promises of regular correspondence and unchanging affection.

Notwithstanding Minnie's long-ago declaration that she'd "warn Bert never to marry a Yankee," she had never found courage sufficient to perform the promise. She knew Bertha's love and reverence for her father, and with all her independence and impulsiveness she could not look into the clear depths of those truthful brown eyes, and insinuate against the honor and honesty of the people to whom Mr. Belmont belonged. Minnie's scorn for, and abuse of, Yankees, never found words in our heroine's presence.

And so she went from the low brown house with the long piazza, all unthinking of the fears that followed her, with a longing and pain in her youthful heart — a soul reaching after something that was lost away in the years gone by.

Would it ever be found? She looked after the old homestead, with its time-stained palings and moss-covered roof, with yearning in her dark eyes, until the thick grove shut it away from her mourning sight. Her yearning gaze went by the old homestead, down the years — three years by-gone — and she bade it a silent farewell as “the dear old place where first they met.” Bertha carried in her hidden heart a secret that was destined to live alone and unsuspected through long, weary, and suffering years to come!

Bertha was gone; Minnie was married; and Edalia was alone in her chamber, restless and sad. Mr. Redmond and Walter were absent. The cool breeze lifted the window-drapery, and a light from Minnie’s apartment flashed through. The idea occurred to her of whiling away the tedium of a long May evening with the young and cheerful wife — cheerful, but not as in other days. Her gushes of wit and mirth seemed forced and foreign, and her liveliest sallies appeared tinctured with languor and weariness. Aunt Cora remarked the evident change, and one day exclaimed:

“I dunno what’s come ter Miss Min, honey. She ain’t like ‘erse’f, somehow. I dunno why, though, fur Mars Charles is a mighty pooty man, an’ ‘pears so ‘fectionate like; but ‘pend ‘pon it, honey, she ain’t happy!”

Edalia’s thoughts went back a few months, as she sat there and looked over at the light glimmering from the young wife’s chamber.

The village-teacher wedded during the winter, and a new one was to be procured. Walter Eldon guaranteed to supply the vacancy with a competent successor.

The morning subsequent to this discussion and decision relative to the subject, Edalia approached the news-stand to deposit a letter for the post, when her attention was arrested by a delicate missive bearing Walter’s superscription, and

addressed to "Miss Agnes Bentley, Richmond, Virginia." Unconsciously she repeated it aloud, when two hands were laid clumsily upon her shoulders, and a jovial voice betrayed "Uncle Ned's" proximity. Edalia started, nervously, and felt the warm current rushing rapidly up.

"Why, hey-day, young lady!—what the deuce!—red as a beet, by Jupiter!"

"No wonder, uncle, considering the provocation."

"Fiddlesticks!—did n't used to be so scary! What's the trouble, eh? Hallo! what's here?"—and he picked up Walter's letter.

"Confound 'er!" ejaculated the old gentleman, with a corrugated brow, but a twinkle of mirth that lingered about his compressed lips as he scrutinized the envelope;—"confound 'er! I'll bet two chincapins that's Wall's music divinity, and the bug's a loyal descendant of one of Ahab's prophets—blast it!"

Little Dick fortunately protruded his round head into the hall.

"Please, sir, Mars Wallie say 'e wants ter see ye in de office."

Edalia escaped further tortures, and soon observed them galloping swiftly away.

Two weeks after, as Edalia sat in the piazza one quiet, early twilight, amid the floating fragrance of thick, golden jessamine-blossoms, and sparkling spring roses, nodding and swaying in sweet low gushes of evening winds, looking over at the low brown house with the long piazza, and dreaming of far-away Bertha, a heavy rumble came drifting down the broad white road, and soon a dusty and spattered carriage came rolling on.

Walter sprang from the office-door at the sound, followed by Mr. Redmond, and strode rapidly to the gate. A white handkerchief waved from the carriage-window as it passed

the young man, who followed swiftly to the low brown house with the long piazza, the temporary home of Agnes Bentley.

Mr. Redmond went slowly up, and threw himself down beside Edalia, with a mortified air.

"She's come, Ed — the little gipsy — confound 'er!"

"Who has come, uncle? You speak enigmatically. I don't comprehend."

"Why, Wall's music divinity — Agnes Bentley — the school-marm — little witch — be hanged to 'er! Should 've thought the boy might 've got in love nearer home. For my part, I think there are as good-looking girls hereabouts as in foreign parts; but *de gustibus non disputandum*. You look sorry, Ed?"

"Me? — no indeed, sir! I don't care a fig about it. It's of no consequence to me whom the young gentleman fancies."

There was a clear glitter of something inexplicable in his smiling eyes, as he turned silently away and passed into the hall.

The succeeding day was a still, sunshiny, and lovely Sabbath. Edalia walked to church with Mr. Redmond. Glancing at Minnie's pew, she met her eye, which directed her in an opposite quarter. Following the indication, she encountered the large, deep orbs of Walter Eldon. Beside him sat a fair, sweet girl robed in deep mourning. Her eyes were bent upon her hymn-book, and the long lashes that fell thickly over them, pencilling her pure white cheeks, were deep black and silky, giving her youthful face a pensive and highly interesting expression. Her wealth of pale, wavy, brown hair was put plainly back over a smooth, round forehead in light, numerous braids. She lifted the dark fringe of those veined lids as Edalia gazed upon her, and a pair of mild dewy hazel eyes unveiled their hidden loveliness.

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Mr. Redmond bent down, and whispered in Edalia's ear: "No wonder Wall loves her!"

But what had become of Minnie's beauty? The brilliancy was gone from her eye, and her round cheek had lost its plumpness and bloom.

Dr. Montrose, too, appeared moody and dejected; Charles alone retained all the vestiges of his former self.

Edalia returned to her quiet chamber, and fell into a train of restless reflections and surmises, from which the dinner-bell aroused her. She descended. Mr. Redmond and Walter awaited her, and they passed into the dining-room.

"And so, Wall," commenced Mr. Redmond, — "and so, Wall, that's your inamorata, eh? A deuced pretty girl, by Jupiter! I'll bet two chincapins, I get a kiss from her red lips in less than a week o' Sundays, and cut you out yet, boy! I say, Ed, isn't she handsome, or 'harnesome,' as the Yankees say — eh?"

"Very."

"Humph! short as pie-crust, by Jupiter! But tell us, Sir Walter, who and what she is — your Virginia blossom? — because, as that same Yankee I've just quoted from, says, I want tew know!"

"The daughter of a broken merchant, sir, upon whose exertions an invalid mother and three young children are dependent. Our acquaintance was purely fortuitous. We met at the mansion of a wealthy citizen of Richmond, she acting in the capacity of music instructress to his daughters. Her history, as related by the benevolent millionaire, enlisted my sympathies, and I sought her residence and patronized her."

"And fell in love upon the strength of it, without even a 'by your leave, Uncle Ned,' eh?"

Edalia stole a glance at Walter to mark his expression, and caught his eye askance in her direction. The rich

blood rushed to his brow, and her own cheeks burned from the detection. The color receded swiftly from his face, and the same rigid and marble appearance she had once before observed became visible in his features.

Mr. Redmond noted the change, and made no further allusion to the lovely stranger.

Aunt Cora overheard this conversation, and with all the sagacity of her race failed not to comment upon it at the earliest possible convenience.

"Lor' bless your heart, honey!" she exclaimed, the instant the door closed upon the retiring gentlemen, "I never did see a boy love hard'r 'n Mars Wallie! The very name on 'er cullers 'm up ter 'is yers! I used ter think you was - boun' ter be 'is bride — 'specially when the snail writ in de plate. I never knowed snails ter fail 'fore; but all signs fails in dry weather, honey; an' 't was a mighty dry time las' May, shore 'nuff, chile! I does wish, Mars Wallie 'd never gone ter Rando'f, 'cause den 'e would n't never seed 'er, honey!" and Aunt Cora sighed, dolefully.

To dissipate the vague and indefinable feelings of gloom that pervaded her as she retrospected the past, Edalia threw on a light shawl, and started for the Doctor's. With accustomed freedom she entered the hall without premonition and proceeded towards Minnie's apartment; but high tones arrested her as she advanced, and inadvertently she hesitated and caught the words:

"Pshaw! a woman's everlasting tears are enough to drive a man to the devil! You need n't sit up for me, as I have an appointment that may perhaps detain me till a late hour. If you are lonely, send for Edalia."

"Eddie is a dear, good friend, but no society can compensate me for the loss of yours. For my sake, don't go, Charles."

"When will you have done with such nonsense, Minnie?"

Do you suppose I'm going to be held in leading-strings eternally, and mope down here with a silly woman, when I've an engagement that demands fulfilment to-night?"

"Time was, Charles, when no society was preferable to mine — when you thought it not irksome to pass a quiet evening alone with me. It is not that I would deprive you of enjoyment, Charles, but that I would have you avoid temptation."

"Temptation be ——! If I have become a slave to the wine-cup, it was *you* who wound the first coil of thralldom around me! You should not reproach me for becoming a proficient under your own teaching!"

"Oh, Charles, if repentant tears could efface the memory of that act, it would long ago have been obliterated from sad remembrance! Let me not have the misery of seeing you sink into ruin and degradation through my agency, Charles! I have atoned for the past by bitter remorse and anguish! Promise me, Charles, to resist, to-night, the insidious wiles of the destroyer to indemnify me for your absence."

"No; I leave you to the indulgence of your own propensities, and claim the same privilege, by ——!"

"Oh, Charles, Charles, you are breaking — my — heart!" and a deep sob burst from the poor weeper.

Hasty footsteps approached the door. Edalia retreated across the hall, and shrank back into the parlor as Charles Chester issued from the apartment, and strode out into the night.

And this was her idol! The object of so many sweet dreams and secret sighs! Edalia shuddered, and thanked the omniscient Being for frustrating every hope of her girlish heart associated with Charles Chester.

Tremblingly she crept from her concealment, and went softly to the door; but the query arose, "should she leave Minnie thus alone and wretched?" She went deliberately

back, and passed into the young wife's chamber. She lay upon a sofa, unconscious of her friend's presence, her slight form quivering with agitation, and the fair curls falling in careless clusters over her face and arm. Edalia went softly and knelt beside her.

"Minnie dear."

She started up, and a deep flush swept over her tearful face.

"I'm *so* glad you've come, Ed. I was just going to send for you. Charles is gone, and papa, and I've made acquaintance with the vapors to-night. But sit down here, Ed, and we'll demolish the fortress of Major Blue, and make him prisoner of war with a good, merry chat as in the olden time!"

And she laughed gayly, with the large liquid tears swimming in her languid blue eyes.

Edalia struggled to repress emotion, and enter cheerfully into her assumed mood; but her thin face, smiling through tears of heart-sorrow to conceal the worthlessness of him who had crushed her once glad spirit, subjugated her firmness, and she dropped her head upon the sofa-cushion and burst into tears.

Minnie fell back with a low, heart-broken cry, and throwing an arm over her friend's neck, laid her young head beside Edalia's, and indulged unrestrainedly in the luxury of tears. She sobbed:

"Edie, why do *you* weep? We have been friends from childhood; let nothing part us now."

"For you, Minnie! I mourn for the destruction of all your fairy dreams and brilliant hopes! I know all, Minnie."

She hid her face and was silent, while a faint rose tinge fluttered over her fair neck.

"It was my duty to conceal his defects. You don't censure me for want of confidence, Edie?"

"No, Minnie; I honor the motive that withheld that confidence. But now, you will let me share your sorrows, and sympathize in all your future sufferings, dear girl?"

"Oh, Edie, I am unworthy of your love — of his! I have wrought my own misery, and his ruin! I tempted him, and he fell! But I could not endure their derision; I trusted in his strength and was deluded, and now we are drifting out on the wide dark sea, far from the shore of Hope!"

"Be composed, Minnie; all hope is not lost. I see a star shining through the clouds, and its golden ray may guide you back into the haven of repose,

‘With truth undimmed within thy breast,
Bear on, and leave to God the rest.’"

She grew gradually calm and confiding, as in childhood days, and Edalia learned that Charles, in his boyhood, was wont to indulge in the intoxicating bowl, till his mother, on her death-bed, extorted from him a promise of reformation, which was preserved inviolate until his wedding eve; and the glass, proffered by the fair hand of his smiling bride, was but the prelude to an anthem of woe!

"It's almost as bad as marrying a Yankee, Ed!" was her closing remark, while smiles and tears struggled for supremacy in her faded blue eyes.

"That reminds me of what I had forgotten. I have a letter from Bertha, Minnie."

"Poor Bert! I wish I had warned her before she went. From the tone of her correspondence, I fear it is too late now."

"It is too late, Minnie; the engagement-ring is on her finger, and yet —"

"And yet she don't *love* him, Ed, — I can see that; and she will awake to the sad truth when too late for her future

happiness — poor Bert! She will be the unresisting victim of a father's prejudice and an idolized brother's influence! I said it years ago — I only hope she will fly at the last!"

"No! she will be led as a lamb to the slaughter! She loves and reverences her father, and will sacrifice herself to obey his will. I wish he understood her better; for she is so shy, even her father has failed to sound the great deep of her nature, if indeed he ever made the effort. He is a strange man — good-natured, easy, and honest, and thinks his judgment a sphere higher than the rest of mankind's, and will have his way in matters that concern others of his household more intimately than himself. I wish such people would mind their own business, or live as single as St. Paul, all their days. He will suffer severely, if she marries his choice, with no choice of her own, for he loves her, and will be punished for his present influence by witnessing her future unhappiness."

"I don't know; I've heard it said that Yankees are glad to get rid of their children on any terms; and that accounts for the surprising number of divorces in Yankeedom continually. The marriage-vow up there is about as binding as the one our darkies make when they jump over a broom into the uncertain state of matrimony. If it does n't suit all parties, they wipe out the landmark with the sponge of a very convenient law, and take another leap into the same state, but from a different point of the compass. Their constant practice does n't recognize the higher law that St. Paul refers to, and which governs our Southern people. Who ever heard of a divorce being applied for in this part of the moral vineyard?"

"I never did."

"No, and never will — until Pilgrim Rock is floated by 'Northern enterprise' down the Atlantic and landed on the coast of Pamlico Sound, and the principles that inhere

become a permanent institution in the South! If the Northern States are so much superior to ours in morals and manners, why do Yankees set in a full tide towards the tropics? You never meet with a Yankee, but he is incessantly lauding up the North to the detriment of the South. Mr. Belmont one day boasted of his native State as the 'land of steady habits,' and I told him, politely, I did n't question the appropriateness of the term, since it certainly required very 'steady habits' to make wooden nutmegs and peg wheat sufficient for Yankee peddlers to supply the South with seed, since he had no manufactories in operation for that laudable purpose."

"You did n't, Min!"

"*I did* — he kindled just fire enough in my Carolina constitution to give him a brand; and he was so easy tempered that he laughed, and said I was 'smart enough to be a Yankee,'—hum! I informed him I was not aware that 'smartness' was limited by geographical boundaries; but if it were, and the intellectual chain lay around free soil to the exclusion of other territory, I was both willing and anxious to take my chance outside of the line."

Edalia threw her head upon the sofa-arm and laughed until the shadows fled from Minnie's thin face, and the olden brightness came back to her blue eyes.

"I never could endure a Yankee—they have tormented the South long before my day, and are likely to continue the persecution so long as slavery exists, until we enact a law prohibiting Northern feet upon Southern soil. Just think of the horrors of Cross Keys through the instigation of Northern men. And all for what? To free our negroes, and take their place. If they are so philanthropic and love the darkies so, why do they let fugitive slaves suffer from neglect and indifference when they escape from their masters and fly to them? It's an old and true say-

ing that 'actions speak louder than words.' And now, poor Bert is going to marry one of the Yankee tribe, and a stranger at that! With her capacity for loving, and true Southern principles, what a life of yearning and struggling is before her, if she unites her destiny with one of an uncongenial spirit. And Horace Stanhope is not of her kind, or her letters would breathe a far different tone. I know her heart is not at rest, with all her admiration of his beauty and full conviction of being adored — poor Bert!"

"No, not at rest, Minnie; that is evident. Peter Simpkins has just returned from Williamsville, where he has been attending court. He visited Bertha, and gives not a very cheering account of her appearance. He says she is smiling and sociable as in other days, but there is a deep-seated sadness in her brown eyes — a frequent introversion that pains the observer. Her rare beauty, he says, 'has turned the world upside-down;' the fame thereof has spread far and wide, and hosts of 'lovers around her are sighing.' Mr. Belmont favors the Yankee suitor, who is remarkably handsome, and devoted to his beautiful *fiancée* — and the marriage is soon to be consummated. But here is Bertha's letter, Minnie; read the poor girl's fate."

CHAPTER XX.

BERTHA'S LETTER.

MAY is here — May, with her lovely blue eyes, golden smiles, and blossom-scented breathings. Sweet, sunny-browed May! She is beautiful, and softly wooing as 'in the days when we went gipsying a long time ago;' but — but I do not enjoy her light and loveliness as in those peaceful, by-

gone days, dear Edie. A change—a great change has come over the spirit of my dreams, since that far-away time. I say *far away*, for I seem to have lived a weary lifetime since I cast a longing, lingering look behind at the low brown house with the long piazza.

“Only four months have been unlinked from the year and left upon the way-side of the past, since we said farewell; and yet I have lived on and on seemingly through years of change and decay, down even to old age. I do not know—I cannot tell how far away in the dim distance the days of childhood look to retrospection’s eye. It seems a long, long way back as I sit here in the fair light of a fresh May-morning, and reach after the buried blessings that will never come again from the days that dropped silently along the pathway of the Past.

“I used to yearn for the great world that glimmered up to imagination’s eye beyond the green rim that belted my little, quiet home; now I yearn more eagerly to steal away from the great world, and hide securely in the purple nooks of the blooming and breezy woodlands that softly cradle the low brown house with the long piazza.

“How truly sang the poet: ‘Blessings brighten as they take their flight,’ and ‘’Tis distance lends enchantment to the view.’

“Will you wonder, Edie, if I tell you I am tired of admiration? Will you think me ungrateful if I say I wish I had been born destitute of that which the world calls beauty? I am weary of being ‘followed, flattered, sought, and sued.’ I want to rest. I feel as though I were drifting upon a wide, blue ocean amid eternal sunshine with no green foliage around to refresh the aching vision and no haven of repose in view. Drifting—drifting smoothly, prosperously, yet aimless and hopeless. Day after day the ocean voyage goes on, around the cycle of the sun-bright hours, for no white

speck of distant shore shines over the deep waters ; and eve after eve I ask myself 'when will it end ?'

"They call me beautiful, and I look in vain at the reflection my mirror gives back for aught to justify the homage hourly paid the substance of the shadow. Brown eyes that burn with soul-hunger and thirst ; pale, auburn hair with glimmers of faded gold ; face, colorless as the York roses that grew beside the low brown house with the long piazza ; and a visible ache in the sunless features of a youthful image reflected there.

"Oh, Edie, could I but nestle down in my dear old home, and live 'little and unknown,' forever hidden from those who flatter and follow me, I would ask no more on earth ! Life seems so hollow and unsatisfying ; the chords of youth are rusting out in this aimless and dormant state. My soul is paralyzed amid the vanities and heartlessness of the world. I long for the wild, free woods — the warbling streams and birds — the sunshiny, silent meadow, and the deep purple of the fragrant and slumberous old pond that shut us out from the superficial and struggling life beyond. A paradise would now appear the humble, rural scenes that were once monotonous and insufficient to a restless spirit, reaching after the untired things across the narrow boundaries of its lowly sphere.

"And thus it is : 'We push time from us, and we wish it back ;' we stretch our hands yearningly towards a seeming better, nor realize the good we thought to gain ! Life's true philosophy is : 'In whatsoever situation we are, therewith to be content.'

"I try to be content now, and think it is God's will that what is soon to come to pass has been ordained in heaven. I do not struggle against my fate, but follow quietly those who would not lead me wittingly into dark and toilsome ways.

"It is my father's and brother's wish, that I should marry Horace Stanhope, and I yield to their desire. Our nuptials will be consummated in a few weeks, and you and Minnie may expect cards of invitation."

"I won't go, I vow solemnly!" interjected Minnie, with two great tears stealing down her white, sunken cheeks; "I won't see her sacrificed by a Yankee father to a Yankee stranger! I'd rather be a—a—" *drunkard's wife*, she meant to add, but Minnie's tongue could not syllable the sound. A wave of crimson rolled over her face, and, with a choking sob, turned from the reader and lay very still.

Edalia swallowed hard and continued the letter.

"As I have insinuated in a former communication, Mr. Stanhope is very handsome and devoted as girlish heart could wish. I think sometimes, nature fashioned me without a heart, or it would have learned to thrill responsive to his own. Perhaps it died years ago, and can never live again. I hope so. It would be torment this side of eternity to feel its capacity for loving another while bound irrevocably to one! God save me from this trial of human strength! There was a time when I thought I possessed a heart as capable of affection as girlish bosom of fourteen tender years ever hid."

"Who, on earth, could it have been?"

Minnie sprang up, with eager questioning in her wide open eyes. "I never imagined that Bert's heart had been touched by the blind god! So young, too — only fourteen! Who was it, Ed?"

Edalia was musing. She was thinking of Bertha's confusion on the occasion of Mr. Redmond's allusion to Dr. Davin, and of her reply to him subsequently.

"Edward Redmond, Esq., perhaps?"

Could it be that her surmises were correct? She roused up at Minnie's eager inquiry.

"I haven't the slightest clue to the discovery, Minnie; Bertha was always confidential with this exception. Strange that we never suspected her! But Bertha has a strong, deep soul, fully equal to the heavy task of bearing and concealing. If he is living, and she meets him after her marriage, it would be far better for her to die now!"

"What! would you fear for the consequences? Do you doubt her sense of duty and distrust her honor, Edalia Redmond?" Minnie's eyes flashed.

"'Lest, after having preached to others, I myself might be a castaway.' 'We know what we now are, but not what we shall be,'" was Edalia's non-committal answer.

"Well, *I* don't doubt her. She would *die* sooner than deviate from the path of rectitude. That is my faith in Bertha Belmont's principles, Ed. I know her."

Edalia smiled — a well satisfied smile.

"My faith is as strong as yours, Minnie; but no human being is infallible; and with Bertha's high sense of duty and honor, and unusual capacity for feeling affection and scorn, (for Bertha can hate as well as love,) it would be far better for her to die now than pass through the fiery ordeal of being hand-bound to one and heart-given to another. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes. You mean she would suffer more than dying — poor Bert! Now finish the letter."

"... It must be that my heart died then, with the fading away of that first girlish dream, and will lie forever pulseless beneath the ruins of its earliest hopes. You will wonder at this, my friend; but you will never know, and no one will ever know now more than is here written. Let the things that were, and the spring-roses that once were bright,

lie under the mould of other and fairer years, that have faded and gone. Would that they could be forgotten, since they can never return !

"A new life is opening before me. I ask myself: Am I equal to the duties it will bring? and I close my ears to the reply. I am afraid to look beyond the present, and reflect upon the great responsibility I am destined to bear. I do not court it — it will be laid upon my weak life. I do not love as I ought to love, to marry! I shall not deceive him, for I have told him all, and he is content to take me with the little affection that I can bring. But I can detect a growing jealousy in his watchful eyes, and I fear.

"I have pleaded to be released from my hasty engagement, but he smiles at my anxiety, and treats my petition as a jest. There is a strange fascination about the man. I pity and half love him sometimes; again, I shrink and tremble when he is near. But, Edie, I never look and listen for his coming, nor grieve when he is gone; and I know it will be sinful in the sight of high heaven to give my hand to one who cannot reach my heart and play a sweet tune on its silvery cords. But I cannot escape. I am but a child, led by stronger hands. I know they would not lead me to sorrow, if they doubted the safety of the untried way. My father and brother love my betrothed, and do not understand me — they never did. They marvel that I should wear a sober face in view of coming events. They say he will be less jealous and exacting when I am all his own. But mortal eyes cannot look down into hidden human nature and see its constitutional defects. Kind forbearance alone can win love after marriage — cruelty will kill !

"My dear mother does not encourage me to fulfil my engagement with one of whose antecedents I know nothing. If alone with her, I should now be free; but she is partially reconciled to the decree by a promise from my betrothed,

never to take me from the parental roof. If the promise is fulfilled, I shall enjoy a negative happiness; if it is violated, I shall rebel, or — *die*!

“But why am I writing you thus, Edie? — not to sadden and distress my dearest and best girl-friends, but ‘coming events cast their shadows before,’ and a great shadow lies over the way, adown which I am going to the veiled years that are but stepping-stones to the quiet grave, and I cannot divest myself of the indefinable feeling that the life of ‘*Bertha the Beauty*’ will be a wreck!”

When Dr. Montrose entered his daughter’s apartment, Bertha’s sad letter was a sufficient screen for her tear-swollen eyes and feverish brow.

Edalia retired to her chamber that night with the consciousness of the unhappiness of her two best youthful friends, added to her own heart-disappointment.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WILD STORM. — EDALIA IS PUZZLED.

ASULTRY August sun blazed in the leaden-blue sky, as Edalia passed through the yard-gate and went lightly down to her wildwood bower.

This bower was formed by the clinging tendrils of a wild vine, twisting thickly and green around a sturdy old oak; and the myriad claspers creeping up modelled an Arab-like tent about the roots, into which she crept through the matted vines, and was effectually shut in from observation. Edalia had never revealed the discovery of this woodland lodge, and fancied its existence wholly unknown to another.

Deeply absorbed in a volume of peculiar interest, she sat, unconscious of the world without, till a vivid flash of lightning quickly succeeded by a heavy peal of thunder startled her, and she sprang through the vines into the arms of Walter Eldon!

He caught her closely to his bosom an instant, then put her coldly and sternly back, and, catching her arm, hurried her towards her uncle's.

"Hasten, Edalia, a storm is brewing—I hear it in the wind!"

Though trembling with apprehension occasioned by the heavens' seeming, the young girl could not forbear smiling at this appropriation amid such a scene.

Walter caught her eye, and the soul's sunshine restored his cold firm face to its wonted softness.

As they emerged from the woods, a brilliant flash illuminated the heavens, and a heavy boom of ethereal artillery heralded a torrent of rain.

Muffling her in a cloak which he had the precaution to appropriate, young Eldon lifted the quivering girl in his arms and ran into the piazza.

Mr. Redmond was there in a fluster. Servants had been dispatched in various quarters where there was a probability of finding the lost one, but returned dispirited.

"Where the deuce did you find 'er, Wall? Fast asleep in Euripide's cave? Wicked elf! See, what a plight you've got the poor boy in!"

And a sorry plight it was, truly; for, in his efforts to shield Edalia, he had become drenched and dripping.

The girl's face betrayed her regrets, for Walter exclaimed:

"Never mind it, Edalia, 'Richard will be himself again' when he descends, and a shower-bath in summer time is n't uncomfortable," and he went up to his chamber.

The drifting rain drove them from the piazza, and they took refuge in the hall, where Walter soon joined them.

"Gratify my curiosity in one particular, Walter."

"Certainly, Edalia, — command me."

"How did you come so opportunely to my rescue?"

"I saw you wending towards your favorite retreat, and hastened thither when uncle sounded the alarm."

"My favorite retreat! Then the knowledge of its locality was in your possession previously?"

He smiled, a strange sunshiny smile. Mr. Redmond caught the infection, and his eye snapped and sparkled.

"Trust him for hunting up wild nooks and Naiad hiding-places! By Jupiter! I —"

A terrific explosion of electricity shook the dwelling to its centre, and involuntarily Edalia shrank closer to Walter.

Peal succeeded peal, and the world seemed ablaze with liquid fire. Terrified beyond conception, Edalia forgot all things but death; and when the dull roar of the terrible storm became distant in the heavens, and the blinding flashes less frequent, she found herself in the arms of Walter, her face hidden upon his shoulder.

Mr. Redmond had disappeared from the hall.

Edalia essayed to escape, but he playfully detained her. She struggled and uttered, impulsively: "Agnes!"

He smiled brightly, and his cheeks flushed.

"What is Agnes to —" He hesitated, and grew deathly pale; released her quietly, and walked coolly away.

Edalia retreated precipitately, to ruminate upon the changeful moods of the incomprehensible man.

When they met again, he was calm, but the color had not returned to his cheeks.

CHAPTER XXII.

HORACE STANHOPE. — GREEN EYES.

THAT fearful August storm raged around the pleasant home of Mr. Belmont, and laid with its wild wind-blast the majestic old sycamore-tree that shaded Bertha's chamber-window from the fervid heat of a sultry summer sun prostrate to the earth.

Bertha saw it fall, and it appeared to cross her young life.

"It is like my hopes," she said; but the sound was only heard in her heart.

For two months she had been a wife, and the great shadow had not been lifted away from her path. It had deepened with the days that died, and hung threateningly over the days that were destined to be born of the shadowy night.

It was the eighteenth anniversary of her birth, and the wild storm seemed typical of the fate of a life that had been thrust upon the world eighteen years ago. She had known no childhood, and old age seemed withering her hungry soul even in early youth. There was an aching void in her heart that Horace Stanhope could not fill, and the effort to conceal his insufficiency to satisfy her spirit-craving rendered her less peaceful than in the days of girlish freedom.

Bertha knew her husband loved her—it was a self-evident fact; no one had ever for a moment distrusted his affection for the beautiful, timid girl he had won from so many admirers; and it was the full consciousness of his entire devotion that had rendered our heroine more yielding to her lover's wooing and her father's will.

Once she had pleaded to be released, and insisted upon

dissolving their engagement from a sense of justice to him and honor to herself; but Horace Stanhope's expression of utter hope-abandonment melted her sympathetic soul to pity and repentance.

From that hour, Bertha ceased to struggle against her fate, and, as she had written to Edalia, she went 'drifting — drifting — on a deep and shoreless sea.' She shut her eyes, and tried to close her ears to the scenes and sounds that awaited her in a new state she was soon to enter, and went blindly and tacitly after her paternal guide.

Mr. Belmont did not suspect the burning secret that lay buried in his daughter's bosom, or he would have stopped short of the boundary that shut her out from full freedom of thought and action. Bertha was the idol of his heart — the pride and pet of his life — and he honestly thought to secure her future felicity by uniting her to one so wholly heart-given to her as Horace Stanhope. He laughed at her 'little foolish fears' and 'silly objections' to her devoted lover. His 'large hands' and 'Yankee idioms' were by no means derogatory to a worthy character. Horace loved her as well as he did himself. His little jealousies that annoyed her would die when matrimony removed all doubt and fear of eventually obtaining her. Jealousy was a certain proof of genuine love.

Honest and honorable himself, Mr. Belmont searched not beneath a shining surface for secret sins; and Horace Stanhope had stains upon his inner life that only keen and watchful eyes could discover. Bertha detected them beneath the well-worn mask of conventionalism, even before marriage; and they grew gradually perceptible to her father when matrimony rendered circumspection no longer politic and necessary to the end in view.

Mr. Belmont opened his remorseful eyes too late to the life-long error he had committed in influencing his daughter

against her better judgment and heart-acquiescence, in a matter of such vital importance as the bridal vow.

Not one month elapsed after Bertha's union, before he was forced to exclaim, in sudden surprise and horror, "Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"

The wild storm raged without, and Bertha knelt at her chamber-window and watched the livid lightning leap from cloud to cloud, weaving burning chains along the wrathful sky. Once she was fearful of the thunder-burst and leaping fire from the wrathful clouds, she would hide in her father's bosom, or under the quilt in her darkened chamber; now she was strong and daring, though the quick flash momentarily burned and blinded her vision.

"It was grand! It was sublime!" she said, as the thunder-crash came down and the liquid fire flamed.

Horace Stanhope thought his young wife reckless, as he sat and watched her, shrinking himself from the live thunder and lurid light.

"Come from that window, Bertha!" he commanded.

"What for, Mr. Stanhope? I want to see. (Oh, what a beautiful chain!)"

"Come here, Bertha!" His tone had a touch of threat like muttering thunder rolling up from afar.

"Please let me stay a little bit. (Oh, what a magnificent blaze!)"

"You promised to obey me, Bertha, — come!"

Bertha went, silently, with an expression akin to martyrdom on her sober face.

"You are a strange girl, Bertha, to admire such wild scenes. I thought you possessed a softer and more feminine soul."

"God made me and the storm too. I am not responsible for my nature, Mr. Stanhope."

"I wish you would call me Horace, *Mrs. Stanhope*."

Your 'Mr.' is like December in May. I have told you so before."

"I *have* tried, but I can't get used to it. I forget. Please excuse me. I don't mean to displease or disobey you. It is n't our Southern style of speaking of or to our liege lord. It does not seem respectful."

"You must renounce your 'Southern style,' now; you are a Yankee's wife, and must learn to be a Yankee."

"*Must!*"

"Yes. You must forget your past life and 'Southern styles,' and live for your husband and his Northern notions."

Bertha's small mouth wore a strange expression. Only a lynx-eye could have detected a hint of scorn in the firm compression. He had drawn her down upon his knee, and his Argus eyes searched her countenance. Horace Stanhope took the 'hint,' and it burned him.

"That is more than I bargained for," she said, dryly. "I will try to perform all that I promised at the bridal altar, but to forget the past and transform our nature at will is not in our power."

"If you loved me, you would find it easy to conform to my wish. It would not have been necessary to call you three times before you obeyed." His eyes flashed.

"I did n't mean to be disobedient; it was such a small thing. I thought you would be willing to gratify me, if you knew how I enjoyed the scene. I did n't suppose —"

"Well? — spit it out."

Bertha crimsoned with indignation at the Northern vulgarity, and made an impulsive movement to leave his knee. But he held her fast, with a clouded brow.

"Let me hear what you 'did n't suppose.'"

"That you would deprive me of a pleasure simply for the sake of exercising your authority and being obeyed."

"And now, why did you wish to leave my arms just now?"

"I am not accustomed to unrefined language, and your style of expression startles me sometimes. I am a creature of impulse, and often act badly without any wrong motive. Don't let me hurt you by sudden shafts. I shall get used to you after a while." The veriest ghost of a smile hovered about her lips, and in her clear hazel eyes.

"I'm afraid you are entirely too refined for me, Mrs. Stanhope!" There was sarcasm in his tone, and anger in his eyes.

Bertha made no reply, but she wondered why he had not made that discovery before it was too late to repair the error.

"Do you think you will ever love me, Bertha?" were his next words, in a softened tone.

She was truthful, and never attempted to deceive. Hypocrisy was foreign to her nature. She said, frankly:

"I shall, if you are kind and forbearing. I love you now, sometimes."

"Yes, you love me when I let you have your own way and lead me by the nose. I would n't give a d—n for such love as that!" He pushed her from his knee, and sprang up, wrathfully.

Our heroine had never before been so taken by surprise. It was the first time she had ever heard him utter a profane word. Before her marriage, one of Horace Stanhope's rivals had informed her of his proficiency in the art of interlarding his language with expletives forbidden by the Decalogue, and she carried the information to her father, which was at once set down by prejudice-blinded Mr. Belmont to jealousy in a rival—a base calumny.

Mr. Belmont viewed Horace Stanhope through a rose-colored lens, until matrimony broke the glass, and he saw clearly. If the father's happiness alone had been involved,

few would have pitied him. It was the first time Horace Stanhope's passionate soul had made such an undisguised display, and Bertha stood in mute astonishment and half despair a moment; then she went quietly to her old place by the window, and looked out upon the subsiding storm.

Stanhope was walking the room with restless strides, and watching her. Suddenly he sprang to the window, and pulled her rudely away. His face was colorless with passion. He hissed:

"Yes, that is your admiration for wild storms and love for that window! You watch and wait for your lovers and give *them* smiles, when you have none for your husband!"

"You hurt me, Mr. Stanhope," was all she said.

He threw her arm from him so violently, that she reeled and fell against the wall. He reached after her quickly, and held her standing before him.

"Bertha, if you love that man, why did you marry me?"

"What man, Mr. Stanhope?"

"That fellow to whom you just gave your sweetest smile, when to me you rarely give a beam of light. I saw it all. Why did you not marry him, and spare me?"

"I don't love him, Mr. Stanhope — I never did. I married you, because you would not release me from my hasty vow. I told you all then. You cannot now reproach me for duplicity. I cannot smile, Mr. Stanhope, when you frown, and torment me with ungentle words. Kindness may win love, but cruelty will kill."

She bared her slender arm, and exposed the marks of his violence. His finger-prints were plainly seen in red and swollen lines, purpling where his ruthless grasp had been.

It was too much for the soul-sick girl. She dropped upon a chair, and burst into tears — the first tears he had ever seen her weep.

Horace Stanhope was on his knees at her feet, in an instant.

"Forgive me, Bertha; I did not mean to hurt you. You know I love you more than life, and it drives me wild to feel you have no love for me."

He laid his face upon her arm, and kissed the purplish prints.

"I told you so," she sobbed,— "but you would not release me, and spare us both. I said we should be unhappy together, but you would not listen to my warning; and now it is *too late!*"

"Dear, it is not too late for happiness. Forgive, and forget the past, and I will be more careful in the future. I would harm myself sooner than you; but I cannot bear to see you smile upon others, and look coldly on me, Bertha."

"You should not indulge such jealous thoughts, Mr. Stanhope. Love cannot be forced — it is not the growth of years, nor gift of will. It is my nature to be led, and not driven. I love you when you are kind and gentle, but I cannot smile and affect fondness, when your reproaches and unjust suspicions repel me. If you will let me live in peace, and not watch and question me continually, your hopes of being loved as you say you love me, will sooner be realized."

"I will try, Bertha, if you will not speak to him again."

"To whom, Mr. Stanhope?"

"That fellow, Harry Herbert. He's a scoundrel, to be hanging round a married woman, and seeking every opportunity to annoy me by his villanous smiles and attentions."

"Mr. Stanhope! I have not exchanged a dozen words with him since our marriage; and his attentions have been too slight for remembrance. He has the reputation of being an honorable man, and is a prominent member of the church."

"Such fellows are the most dangerous! If a reward

were offered for the grandest rascal in existence, I'd go to the church-fold to find him! Will you promise me, Bertha?"

"It will reflect dishonor upon you, Mr. Stanhope,—people will suspect the cause; and your reputation is dear to me."

"Let them suspect. I will take the responsibility. He loved you before your marriage, and the fellow annoys me by his efforts at gallantry and saintly smiles. Will you promise, Bertha?"

"I will, if it will disarm your jealousy, and leave me in peace."

And so the days went on; more quiet, but not more hopeful, to Bertha. Horace Stanhope had fallen in her estimation since their marriage, and the great void in her young heart was fast filling up with bitter waters.

Having married him through the influence of her father and brother, and trusting to his own affection to learn to reciprocate it, there was no love to hide his defects, and restrain the contempt irresistibly inspired by a constant exposure of his mental deformity.

It was a bitter pain for one of her yearning and poetic temperament to feel the up-gushings of scorn for him to whom she was securely bound by a life-long vow — for weal or for woe!

Bertha looked off into the veiled future, with sunless spirit-eyes, and the great cry of her struggling soul was: "*When will it end?*"

Disease fastened upon her frail form, and through the long, weary months of autumn and winter shut her in from the admiring and sympathizing world.

After that wild August storm, "Bertha the Beauty" was seen no more beyond her clouded home, until the first bird of spring time sent up its silvery song in the budding wood-

lands ; and she was providentially spared the pain of meeting a kind Christian friend with unjustifiable and inexplicable coldness.

And "Bertha the Beauty is dying!" was heard, day after day, in the great world where she had so lately reigned in maiden loveliness — the admired of all admirers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TEMPERANCE LECTURE. — JONES'S STORE.

THE whistling winds of a cold December day made frost-work upon the window-panes, as Edalia came in from a visit to Minnie.

Mr. Redmond was away in the town of Tarboro', on business pertaining to his profession ; and Walter, she imagined, was mentally merged in a ponderous pile of formidable folios in the office.

Though gentle in his demeanor and ever considerate, he had grown apparently colder and more constrained since the circumstance occasioned by that wild August storm ; and nature had constituted Edalia for a consummate illustration of the principle permeating Cowper's couplet :

" The man I trust, if shy to me,
Will find me as reserved as he."

She was surprised, on entering the parlor, to find him extended upon a sofa, apparently in profound enjoyment of "tired nature's sweet restorer."

Edalia drew back instinctively, meditating a retreat ; but the crimson hue of his cheeks wrought a revulsion of feel-

ing. She went surreptitiously up and knelt beside him, and laid her hand softly upon his forehead; it was burning hot, and the swollen blue veins upon his temples throbbed with fever.

Alarmed at the symptoms, she uttered a correspondent exclamation. He opened his eyes and smiled.

Edalia arose quickly, and remarked, quietly:

"You require medical aid, Walter; I shall summon Dr. Montrose."

"No; it is unnecessary. Come and sit here, Edalia. It is but a transient ailment. Come here, Edie."

He had not, since boyhood, addressed her by that pet name. She drew an ottoman beside him, and granted his request. He laid her hand upon his flushed forehead, and looked earnestly into her eyes, murmuring:

"Oh, fate, fate!"

A pallor overspread his face. He lay thoughtfully a moment, then continued, with an effort:

"Edalia, will you marry Colonel Henley?"

"Never! Colonel Henley possesses no interest in my heart paramount to friendship. I have declined the honor he proposed to confer."

He smiled again, and the rose returned to his cheeks.

"I rejoice at this disclosure; for, though obviously a desirable conquest as regards wealth and station, yet Colonel Henley stands upon the brink of a precipice, and I would not have my — I would not have you, Edalia, unite your destiny with one of whom we have so frail security against eventual precipitation. May heaven avert from you, Edie, the calamity that has befallen Minnie Chester — an inebriate's wife!"

"Poor Minnie! Is there no hope of Charles, Walter? Can he not be reclaimed?"

"Without some restraint involving his honor, there is no

hope, Edalia; but we should never despair in an effort for the accomplishment of a worthy object. I can harbor no hope of his reformation until he pledges himself to total abstinence from all intoxicating beverages. Men will brutalize their nature in an hour of unbridled passion who would hold inviolate a promise reflecting upon their honor; and Charles, though led captive by sensuality, degenerate, and sadly fallen, has this redeeming trait."

"He must — he will be saved; perchance to-night."

"Alas, no! he will not attend. Do you go, Edalia?"

"I shall, if —"

"If what, Edie?"

He drew her gently toward him, and pulled her curls playfully over his eyes and lips.

"I shall, if uncle returns, and —"

He interrupted her.

"If uncle returns? Won't you let *me* be your escort, Edalia?"

"With pleasure, if you desire it; — but Agnes —?"

The color deepened on his brow as he replied:

"Ever mindful of Agnes! Do you love her so truly?"

"I love her very dearly."

"Would you have me marry Agnes, Edalia?"

"If it is your wish. I desire your happiness, Walter."

He started up. The rich blood rushed to his face, and his eyes flashed. He stooped, wound his arms around her waist, and lifted her to the sofa beside him.

"My happiness! It is in — do you think I could —"

He ceased, rose hastily up, ejaculating vehemently:

"Great God! — I *dare* not!"

He was deathly white.

Mr. Redmond's cheerful voice echoed up from the yard in answer to the familiar greeting of petted little Dick, and Edalia slipped silently away.

It was a cold clear night, lit with myriad stars, and the crescent moon streaking the dark violet sky with a pathway of silver radiance.

Edalia walked to the old school-house with Walter. Mr. Redmond chaperoned Agnes. The large room was crowded to its utmost capacity with the gay villagers—old men and maidens, young men and mothers—an heterogeneous mass huddled together, with curious hearts to witness the novel scene.

A *Temperance Lecture* was a novel affair in this quiet country place, and eagerly the excited inhabitants gathered together to enjoy a scene so rare.

The desks were ranged around the wide walls, and little children—neat and rosy, ragged and pale—nestled upon the niched and ink-stained lids, peering with great wondering eyes over the heads of the adult audience, toward the speaker's stand.

He rose—a tall, thin man, with clear gray eyes and silvery hair. His voice was low and plaintive as he portrayed the sufferings of woman arising from this curse of man: the toiling, careworn wife; the cheerless hearth; the pale and famished offspring; the dark and dreary future, dim with weeping over loved ones imbruted by this desolating scourge,—and a stifled sob arose from weary ones in that dense and hushed assembly.

Gradually his voice expanded; his gray eye flashed; the hot blood crept to his pale brow; and “Death to the Tyrant!” was greeted with a burst of applause.

He sat down, and “Henley! Henley!” floated through the crowd as the tumult subsided.

Edalia started with surprise and indignation to behold him answer to the call, and ascend the stand to combat the principles of the aged speaker.

She said, mentally:

"Man! God-like man! created in the image of his Maker, prostituting the glorious gifts of Divinity to the perversion of truth, in the sustenance of an evil that has deluged the world with woe, and drifted innocent and helpless hearts out upon the wide ocean of despair, and ingulfed them in the whirling maelstrom of death!"

It was a bold and brilliant advocacy of the cause he espoused, but "*Mene, mene, tekel upharsin*" was written, with the glitter of his own eloquent sophistry, upon the already tarnished fame of Tom Henley. It was meet that a libertine should advocate the cause of the "enemy that steals away the brain."

Beside Edalia sat a pale, feeble woman, gazing imploringly, with tearful eyes, at the handsome face of the gifted speaker.

Walter turned his large blue orbs upon her, and they emitted the brilliancy of diamonds. His face crimsoned, and he grew restless. As Henley closed his defence he sprang up, unbidden, and advanced toward the stand.

"Eldon! Eldon!" echoed around, and the old room rang again.

It was his first effort at public debate, and Edalia trembled with excitement. Mr. Redmond glanced toward her, as the young man sprang, with graceful elasticity, upon the platform, and his eyes snapped and glittered with proud animation.

An appearance of shrinking and timidity overspread his features as his eyes wandered over that silent assembly, and he realized his position; but turning boldly and scornfully toward the last speaker, and pointing his finger at the wondering Henley, he exclaimed, in a full and distinct tone:

"Woe unto you! — you entered not in yourself, and those that were entering in you hindered!"

He grew assured and fearless; his face became radiant

with the sunshine of a noble and sympathizing soul. His voice rose and fell with the plaints and ecstasies of feeling, and his fine form swayed and expanded with the ebb and flow of eloquence, and the flashes of wit and enthusiasm.

Henley turned pale beneath his stinging sarcasm and scathing wit, and the old lecturer smiled.

"God bless him!" breathed the feeble woman beside Edalia, as tears and smiles struggled for predominance in her faded, sunken eyes.

Walter descended from the stand, and resumed his seat beside Edalia, amid a storm of applause from the admiring audience.

Calmly and inquiringly he looked into the young girl's eyes. She laid her hand impulsively in his. He clasped it with his own peculiar clasp — gentle and soft, but firm as adamant.

The PLEDGE was brought forward and handed through the assembly, and name after name ran down the double column.

Edalia watched with intense interest the pale sufferer beside her. Her dilated eyes were fixed upon a haggard man in a distant quarter, as the official member approached him and presented the PLEDGE. He glanced toward her and smiled, grasped the white sheet resolutely, and hastily affixed his signature. She clasped her small, toil-hardened hands nervously, dropped her face upon them, and a tremor agitated her bowed form.

"Thank God, there is one more trophy!" exclaimed Walter Eldon, with a sigh of relief.

A loud acclamation went up from the ragged and riotous portion of the assembled rustics as they issued from the old school-house into the keen wintry air:

"Hurraw for Colonel Henley! — hurraw for handsome Hen!"

Edalia shuddered, and clung closer to her companion, mentally contrasting his proud manly worth with the miserable debauched crew.

Wending homeward, a mercantile establishment after the country order threw its streams of candle-light across their way.

This establishment was at once the repository of dry-goods, hardware, groceries, confections, and malt liquors, indiscriminately blended, and was known to all the country round as "Jones's Store."

Old Jones had gone the way of all the earth long years ago, with the assistance of his own excellent brandies and a drunken M.D., but his name lived on in the famous institution he had founded; and hunters and trappers of wild beasts found Jones's Store a wonderful convenience for disposing of the animals' skins, and refreshing their inner man with the liquid proceeds.

Bertha's brother — little Claude Belmont — had, in early childhood, been cheated into senseless intoxication by the founder of this establishment for his own amusement; and mother and sister never forgave the soulless deceiver.

Old Jones slept soundly now in his cold bed, and his "Store" was destined to lay many more as low as himself.

Edalia caught the name of her companion through the unclosed door, and laughingly arrested his progress, surveying the group within through a broken window-pane.

"I say, Gov'ner, *did* you hear young Eldon's maiden speech?"

"No."

"Then, by jux, you missed a figure *there*, old boy! Haw, h-a-w! — the way he did put Hen's chunk out was a sin to Davy Crockett!"

"Good! Well, I'll swing by the seven stars if I did n't

always say he'd make a famous lawyer! How did Tom take it?"

"Take it! *Je-rusalem!* (Give us a horn o' brandy, Boniface; I'm deuced dry. None o' your wish-a-washy stuff—brandy 'n sugar—but a good mug o' the *ginequine*, to wet my whistle with.) Take it! *Ore-ation!* He collapsed quicker!—knocked right under, and looked savage as a meat-axe in the holidays!"

Mr. Peterroy Simpkins here stalked up from the farther extremity of the store, and hooking both thumbs in the arm-holes of his flaming satin vest, put his shining boots as far apart as comfort allowed, and throwing his small, round head back until the cigar in the corner of his lordly mouth stood up like a stove-pipe, he responded:

"Beg pardon for dissenting from your sapient judgment, Mr. Tomlin; but, in my most humble opinion, Colonel Henley's address was immeasurably exalted to an eminence far beyond Mr. Eldon's capabilities to attain. Mr. Eldon's powers of oratory, sir, are emphatically and incontestably ordinary—*ordinary*, sir, in the literal acceptance of the term. He betrays a lamentable deficiency in genius and reprehensible neglect and inconsiderateness with reference to the segregation of labials, which, by an oral combination, produce euphony upon the tympanum of the sentient organ, while Colonel Henley's oration was ornate, and replete with all the transcendent expletives of—"

"Go to the devil with your dictionary, you barrel o' soap! I say Wall's a trump, and no mistake,—bumped Hen's knowledge-box with a witness, and no dodgin'! Say, Major, what's the price o' this calico?"

"Twelve 'n half cent."

"Twelve kingdoms! W-h-e-w! Say ten, and it's a go—plank down, and no grabbin'."

"Can't do it; cost me 'leven 'n New York."

"Crackee! — that 's a whopper! But I 'm bound to try it on, or the old woman 'll buzz about my ears like green flies round 'lasses-flitters! Cut me off eight yards, old Skinflint, and charge it to the town-pump. I say, fellers, I 'll bet a gallon of old Griper's best, Wall and that little black-eyed Ed 'll make a match of it."

Edalia started convulsively, and struggled to retreat; but, throwing an arm around her waist, he held her firmly but gently.

"Please let us go," she pleaded, with crimson face.

"Wait a moment," he said, softly; but she did not see the lips that uttered it, and the eyes that searched for hers.

"I have the honor to inform you, Mr. Tomlin," said Peter, "that Mr. Eldon is affianced to Miss Bentley; and I have it from an authentic source, that their nuptials will be consummated as early as compatible with his financial affairs."

"Creation! — you don't say? Well, I live too fur in the woods to be posted in such things; but I 'd a-swore he loved her; and you may take my hat if the gipsy don't love *him* — no two ways 'bout *that*. I 've been an amorous swain once upon a time, and it did me good to see the round tears shine in her black eyes to-night, while Wall was put'n hell to the Colonel. I 'll take that bet back, Pete; can't afford to waste a gallon on a lost game. She's an all-fired pretty girl — prettiest one in these parts, now that 'Bertha the Beauty is gone — no two ways about *that*!"

A slight tremor was perceptible in the manly arm that gradually tightened around Edalia during this speech, resisting her efforts to escape.

"I importunately implore your most gracious and magnanimous lenity for a duplicate dissent from your mature judgment, Mr. Tomlin; but in my opinion, Miss Redmond's personal attractions are by no means above mediocrity, in-

controvertibly ; and her mental acquirements and constitutional temperament, I am fully qualified to assert, operate as a centrifugal — ”

“ I say, old Closefist, give this man a dose o’ peppermint. He’s swallowed Walker, and run agin’ a snag ! *Jim-i-ny!* Well, I’d a bet a cool hundred, he and Ed would a fixed it ! Splendid match it would make, on the equal division plan ; for, thanks to his old rum-guzzling father (like me !) Wall’s poor as market-milk, and she’s rich as cream-crust ! Say, old Moneytight, give us another bung-starter. I’m goin’ to have one more blow-out with brandy, and then sign the Pledge ! ”

A roar of laughter followed this announcement.

“ I tell *you*, fellers, I’ve got waked up to-night ; I b’lieve nature meant me for something more’n makin’ worm-fences, with a brick in my hat ; and if it had n’t been for — but mum’s the word, boys ; a man’s bound to stick up for his country and his wife ! Goin’ to marry Agnes, eh ? *Je-miny!* ”

A footstep was heard advancing ; they left their position and hastened homeward, proceeding in unbroken silence, until Mr. Redmond’s hand fell, jocularly, upon Walter’s shoulder.

He started and spoke, but his voice was strange — sepulchral !

CHAPTER XXIV.

LITTLE CHARLIE. — “ NO HOPE.”

THE old clock in the corner chimed one. Agnes rose and bent over the slumberer. The long brown lashes lay in thick fringe upon her snow-white cheeks. She was

lovely, but sadly changed from the bright, brilliant Minnie Montrose of other days.

A tiny wail came from the downy cushions of a cradle-bed and touched the sensitive ear of the young mother. She opened her languid eyes and whispered :

"Charlie."

Agnes lifted the wee thing in her white arms, and laid it sobbing upon the bosom of its girl-mother. She pressed its round chubby cheek to her thin face, and raising her dim blue eyes to Edalia's, murmured :

"Has he come?"

"Not yet. Try to sleep, Minnie dear; it is not so late."

She turned away with a suppressed and shuddering sigh, whispering :

"Lost! lost!"

Two! rang out upon the death-like stillness of night — ebbing away — away in the dim distance — it died.

Footsteps echoed in the hall, heedless and dull. The chamber-door was thrown rudely open, and Charles Chester, bloody and blustering, reeled into the room.

"Sh, Charles," — and Edalia pointed to the sleeper.

He drew his hand abstractedly across his brow, crept cautiously to the bedside, and gazed remorsefully upon the wan face of the young sufferer. The scene half sobered him, and recalled his scattered senses. He laid his face upon the pillow, and groaned :

"Wretch!"

"Charles, there is blood upon your face! It would kill her to see you thus!"

Dr. Montrose led him unresistingly from the chamber.

Agnes sank back amid the velvet cushions of the old arm-chair and sobbed, as the young husband and father passed with unsteady step through the closing door.

Edalia sat at her feet, and leaned her head upon the chair-arm.

"Oh, Edie! what a scene! So noble, and yet so lost! There is no hope now, Edie! The last pale star is extinguished! He has descended to a depth where reputation is lost in indifference!"

Edalia made no reply, but "no hope" lingered upon her ear and crept startlingly through every lane of memory. The brightness of two short weeks was overcast, and the sunlight gathered behind the gloom, only gushed through transparencies in the dense black cloud, to trace in letters of fiery light — "no hope!"

Sitting there at the feet of the betrothed bride of him whom she had feared and shunned as fated to stand in the same relation to her, without power, on her part, to escape her destiny, Edalia wondered and choked at the conviction of the great change that had come over her since that feelingly far-distant time—seventeen months ago.

Sitting there, in the silent chamber of the broken-hearted wife of him she had once so loved, she thanked heaven, from a full heart, that no irrevocable bond bound her to one so fallen and irreclaimable.

Sitting there, in the still small hours of the ghostly and grieving night, she went back through the years that were gone, and wondered why God had chosen them—the once happy and love-linked trio—to suffer, most of all the young and merry crowd that had grown up to blooming womanhood together. Bertha was fading fast away—a frail ship at sea, tossed by the rude winds and rough waves;—a little longer buffeting of the swelling waters and strengthening storm, and the helmless bark would go down beneath the dark billows!

Minnie was dying of hope deferred! The little spring buds that jewelled the rose-tree in the garden of her youthful life had been blighted by early frost, ere their green cups had held the fragrant unfolded blossoms. The last one that

promised fair to open in the trembling sunshine of a new morning, had fallen now in the wintry chill of a starless night! Soon that weak heart must be crushed into silence beneath the weight of its withered hopes, and she would be alone. *Alone!* — nothing to reach after and live for! Nothing to lead her on, day after day, shining up in the future, with promise of overtaking it after a while. Life was a blank sheet, with no “Watch, Wait, and Hope” written by fortune’s finger for her!

Edalia held her breath to suppress a sob; Minnie slept on in blissful unconsciousness of her husband’s fall into deeper degradation; Agnes sat very still, with closed eyes, and small waxen hands clasping a visible prayer; and the soft September winds made sad melody around the eaves, blending their grieving moans with her mental grief.

CHAPTER XXV.

HORACE STANHOPE’S REPUTATION AMONG HIS RELATIVES.

IT is a low dilapidated frame house, in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Silas Stanhope, the brother of Horace, is the proprietor. Silas is a good, honest, hard-working, humble-minded man. He wears a shocking bad hat, patched trousers, brown shirt, and no shoes. He is as low in stature as he is in mind, and as easy in disposition as Mr. Belmont himself.

Silas has a small “farm” of rocks and grass, Indian corn of very short stalks, Irish potatoes, and thickly-set onions.

The “farm” is cut up into small squares, triangles, quadrangles, *ad infinitum*, by low fences, to separate the onions

from the small corn, and the small corn from the big rocks and tall grass.

Beyond the low dilapidated frame house, the "farm" is pushed up by nature into high lands, groaning beneath the weight of granite piles gathered from the cultivated parts by immense labor, and heaped for future use in running stone walls; till then, a snug refuge for snakes and cunning chipmucks.

The high lands behind the frame house are sacred to winter-apple, chestnut, and walnut-trees, inaccessible until the growth of long, suspicious-looking grass is cut short, and raked into high and dry hay mounds. Yankee carefulness forbids a foot upon the green sea, until the luxuriant crop is safely beyond the injury of a heedless step. You must go round your elbow to get to your thumb, where grass is cultivated for food.

On the right of the dilapidated frame house is a good-sized barn, lonely in seeming, as is indeed the whole country around. Turn your eyes in any direction and they hit against hills before they reach the length of their line of vision.

And dotting those hills are tiny white specks of houses, clinging to the sides, seemingly, in an uncertain state of security, with little sickly lines of blue smoke, lazily curling from the small cages seeking an outlet from the rock-bound vale in the upper air.

You look around the deep, silent, solemn valley, and feel as though you had been shipwrecked in sleep, and washed into a funnel; and you try, day-long, to look over the high, hard rim from the lonely hollow and catch a cheering glimpse of the broad level Beulah lands of your dear sweet native South.

On the left of the dilapidated frame house is a cow-yard and pig-pen; three cows and one pig are the occupants; and

Silas Stanhope and three sons are milking and feeding the grunting and lowing quadrupeds.

Silas wears a garment over his pants that puts you to the blush with its peculiar cut. You have never seen it worn in that fashion before, and think it highly unbecoming as an outer garment; and though you find you have misnamed the article, it does not lessen its likeness to the original nor increase your kindness for the custom.

There are no flowers or flowering shrubs and vines about the door and in the narrow yard before the frame house. There are no instruments of music beneath the low roof, besides the strong lungs of a Yankee babe and cooking-utensils.

Martha Stanhope, the wife and mother, is a large, sun-burnt and fire-faded woman, with blue eyes and black hair. She is hard-working and weary-looking, but carries a kind, lovable nature under an unrefined exterior. If you converse with the tired housewife about the cares and vexations of this life, she will tell you, frankly:

"If I'd known I should've had five children, and such a lot of work to do, I never would've married!"

Silas turns his good-natured eyes upon her as he sits in a home-made chair by the kitchen-fire, and smiles in his easy, quiet way. Then he puts his bare toes nearer the warm blaze, and nods after his hard day's work.

It was Monday, and the soap-suds flew and hissed under Martha Stanhope's flushed face, and whitened her red arms laid bare to the shoulders.

"Five children and a man make lots of work for one woman every Monday," she said, soberly.

The soap-suds splattered and hissed, and the baby spluttered and cooed as it crawled around the kitchen on a tour of inspection. Martha Stanhope said her baby went on *pick-it* duty every wash-day, while her *arm-y* lay in *clothes* quarters.

Silas made an unexpected advent into Martha's presence, with an unusually brisk step, holding an open letter in his brown hand.

"I say, Mat, Horace is married!"

"I want tew know!" said Martha, squeezing the soap-suds from her red arms and drying them with her apron.

"Sure 's a gun, Hor 's married; to a Southern beauty at that, and worth seventeen thousand dollars!"

"Dew tell!" ejaculated Martha, wiping the perspiration and soap-suds from her face and smoothing out her apron to dry. "Wall, Horace is *ra-al* harnsome, and I don't wonder he done so well."

"I hope he hain't deceived the girl, and not git intew trouble when he 's found eout. Horace is harnsome, but a sad dog — never would settle down tew honest work, but must run off tew New Yorick as counter-hopper; and now he 's way-down in North Caroliny 'mong the nasty niggers, and married tew a rich beauty! Here it is: 'Bertha the Beauty' — that 's what she 's called."

"Be they comin' on?"

"Guess not — narthin' said 'bout it in this document. Mr. Belmont, his father-in-law, has set him up in business — has a good store, and if he settles down soberly, he may dew well. But I have my doubts if the boy has sowed all his wild oats yet. If she has Southern fire in 'er, she 'll burn 'im some time, if he 's the same Horace that used tew work on my farm. You remember Sue Tolman?"

"Yas; an' it broke her heart! Horace is dreadful jealous-minded — that 's so."

"If his wife is fiery, he won't break *her* heart; but she 'll break his head, if he treats her as he did Sue. If he 'd married that girl, as he promised, 't would a' bin worse for her an' better for the one he 's got now, I 'm thinkin'!"

"I wonder Horace married. I set him down for an old

bach'. Such harnsome men don't often marry — they 're too vain and fond of flirtin' with the girls; and Horace was dreadful proud of his beauty and precious self generally. And then, he's only twenty-three."

"The fellow's in love; I can see that as clear as you can my nose. And that'll make it all the worse for her; for he'll torment 'er tew death or fury with his green eyes. Horace is the jealousest rascal that ever lived after Bluebeard. Why, he showed it in everything. If mother give me a piece of pie as much bigger than his as I was of him, he'd cry for another bit, tew be even with mine. No girl ever loved a boy better'n Sue Tolman did him, and he deserted 'er from suspicion, and broke her heart! And that ain't all. There's Annette Lynn, whose good name he ruined; and the Lord knows how many more! And all because his face was harnsome, an' beauty made 'im vain."

"Yas; Horace thought he had the world in a sling and could heave it over the moon, because the girls showed their hook before the fish bit. I wonder if Bertha courted him, or he her? I don't know the Southern style, but I must say it's about half-and-half here, since my day; perhaps three-fourths, with the girls! It dooz beat the world how they do court the men, nowadays!"

"Horace will do well enough if he can keep the green out 'n 'is eyes. He has a good heart, an' is a rale gentleman outside. I hope he did n't pass himself off as the nephew of John Jacob Astor — it's like 'im, though. He always was proud, and held a head higher than his purse. I'd like tew know if he's fooled the girl. If he has he'll get burnt, I'll bet; for they say them Southern girls spit fire! Wall, I don't know how you feel about it, but I have a sort o' notion it won't end well. I wonder girls will marry strangers."

"You know the old saying, 'Strange faces.' If she's

rich and beautiful, she loves him, of course ; or she would n't a-took him and left better ; for there 's always plenty tew run after money, if there 's no beauty along with it ; and a little love will forgive a good many sins. But perhaps Horace hain't deceived her, at last."

"I don't know — Horace never set out for a thing but he 'd have it at any cost of truth and honor. And the way he loves her, from the talk of this letter, *I* would n't trust 'im for honesty. He never had much of it in his best days, for he was continually running intew debt, without any prospect of gettin' eout ; and, in the end, some of us would have tew foot the bill tew save his credit ! He give me a saddle once worth fifteen dollars, and in a week he took it away tew help pay a bill he 'd run up in Pittsfield. And the whole of that bill ain't paid tew this day — the dishonest dog !"

"If Bertha's property gits intew his hands, there won't be much left of it in a few years, I dew think ! Horace is the only spendthrift — or 'black sheep,' as they call him — in the family ; the rest of 'em know how tew keep money well enough. Horace never could hold on tew a dollar long enough tew keep seed in his pocket tew swear by. It slipped right through his fingers tew feed his whims ; and then he 'd borrow as long as a body would lend, and trust tew luck tew carry him threough."

"Yas, that 's so. And he always got threough with my money, or some of his family's, who had more care for his character than he had himself, until he took that saddle tew pay for his meanness. *I* shan't square any more bills for him — I veow ! I should n't wonder a mite if he was in debt when he married, and his wife's father 'll have tew settle the claims ! And won't that stir up his new relations, I 'd like tew know ?"

Even while Silas was privately commenting upon his

brother's worth, Mr. Belmont was paying the merchant and tailor in Williamsville for Horace Stanhope's wedding-suit! He had married the old man's daughter without sufficient means in his purse to pay for his bridal outfit!

It was on this occasion that Mr. Belmont exclaimed:

"Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"

It was then that Bertha discovered her husband had neither honor nor sense of shame; and the respect he had inspired by his refined deportment, tender devotion, and personal charms, fell silently away, and left her hopeless and helpless — fastened by Fate, to a mockery of manhood, with the Gordian knot of a lifelong vow

The Southern merchant and tailor smilingly informed the mortified and offended father:

"It was only a Yankee trick!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

EDALIA BETRAYS HER SECRET SORROW. — WALTER ELTON'S CONFESSION.

LOR' bless yer heart, honey! Miss Min's nuthin' but a shadder! I tuck them grapes in myse'f, an' I 'clare, honey, I like ter bust out cryin' the minit I seed 'er! I don't b'lieve she 'll live long — po' thing! She looks pine blank like Miss Evy 'fore she died!" And Aunt Cora groaned, as she moved about the tea-table.

"Did you see Charles, aunty?"

"Yes, chile; he was dare, lookin' as sorry an' sick as ef 'e was set'n by 's mammy's grave wid de baby in 'is lap! Bless its little heart, it dunno what trouble it's born ter in dis wicked worl', honey — po' thing! Ef Mars Charles on'y

would sign de Pledge, as da calls it. But it's mighty hard ter break loose when de brandy is got holt on 'em onct. Ter think Mars *Charles Chester* would ever git drunk an' fight! Sakes alive! I don' blame 'im fur whippin' 'im, do, honey, fur my ole man ses how he was at de store comin' from de quarter ter see me, an' hearn Mars Peter talkin' some big words 'bout Miss Min, an' de fust *he* knowed Mars Peter was a-rollin' on de floor, an' Mars Charles 'long top on 'im! Dat's all brandy's good fur, honey—ter ruin characters an' break hearts! Rum is jest like de ole sarpint in de 'Rabian Nights, what Mars Wallie used ter read ter you, chile, when he was a little boy. Jest let 'im git out 'n de bottle onct, an' he 'll swell an' swell ter a big giant; an' it's mighty hard work ter fool 'im back ergin, an' git a chance ter put in de stopper on 'im! Dey better not tech it at fust, honey. I hopes my little missus 'll never see trouble 'bout dat—ole Aunt Cory does."

"No, for I shall never marry, aunty."

"Shaw!—you thinks so now, chile, but you 'll git marred bumby, honey—ole Aunt Cory *knows* you will. I hopes it won't be ter a mean Yanky, do, like Miss Bert—po' thing! I hearn Mars Peter say she looks like a ghose, an' Mars Belmont has turned her husban' out o' doors fur his meanness. She better not a had 'im at fust, honey. 'Pears like de pootiest gals is de mose onluckiest—it does *so*! 'Cause why? Dey haves so many chances dey dunno which ter take fust, an' dey gits de meanest at last! Miss Aggy is de lucky chile. I wishes Mars Wallie'd never gone ter Verginny; I'd gin *anything* ter see you an' him marred, honey—I sot my heart on it long ergo. Di says she seed Miss Aggy's weddin'-frock at Miss Crissy's dis mornin'—white muslin all kivered over wid lace, an' satin buttons and bows. Miss Crissy tole Miss Hattie Simpkins, 't was in a whisper, an' Di hurd it. Ain't you gwine to be bridesmaid, honey?"

"I don't know, aunty; Agnes has never spoken to me on the subject."

A choking sensation seized Edalia; she turned away, and leaned upon the window-sill.

The round October moon threw a shower of silver radiance through the old sycamore limbs, sweeping the slumberous eaves, down upon the red leaves and sparkling grass; spreading a soft, misty gauze over the moaning tree-tops in the dusky grove; and a whippoorwill set up its plaint off in the moonlit hazy woods, waking the painful hush of nature with a pulse of life.

A wind-waft came up from the silent graveyard, dimly outlined in the gray of twilight, moaning through the boughs, and sweeping onward with a low and pensive sound, far away through the mellow moonlight—and the great heart of night stood still.

A hand was laid gently upon the young girl's bowed head, and a gay voice startled her sluggish blood to a swifter flow.

"O Edie! twine the laurel around the Victor's brow! The day is won, and — why, Edie?"

His light tone died away, and he stood looking at her, sadly and in silence.

"In tears, Edalia! — why does she weep, aunty?"

"Lor' bless yer heart, chile, I dunno, honey! She jes bin talkin' ter Aunt Cory, piert as a cricket! What's de matter wid de chile?"

"Nothing, aunty, but the cool wind and flower-pollen vexing my weak eyes. And you have triumphed, Walter? Let me congratulate you upon your success at the commencement of your professional career."

Disregarding her reference, he turned and said, mischievously:

"Tell me what she was talking about, aunty."

"Oh, ever so many things, honey — 'bout Miss Min an' Mars Charles, an' Miss Aggy, an' —"

"And what of Agnes?" he interrupted.

"*She* did n' say nuthin' — on'y I was tellin' 'er 'bout Miss Aggy's widdin'-frock. When is you gwine ter be marred, honey?"

"In about five years, aunty."

"Luddy, chile! de white frock 'll turn yaller 'fore then, sakes alive!"

"Come from that window, Edalia; the 'cool wind and flower-pollen are vexing your weak eyes' again."

With a bright smile and glowing cheek he drew her hand within his arm and led her into the parlor.

He placed her in the full blaze of the candle-light, and leaning over to command a fair view of her face, said:

"When is Agnes to be married? Be still, Edalia, and answer me."

"I don't know. She has not made me her confidante."

He smiled strangely.

"Whom is she to wed, Edalia?"

"I am utterly ignorant."

"But what says rumor?"

"Mr. Eldon, I object to this catechizing when your information far surpasses mine. Allow me to remove from this glare; it is absolutely blinding."

"*Mr. Eldon!* Edalia! this from *you*?"

"Forgive me, Walter; I —"

A suffocating sensation rendered abortive every effort to articulate another syllable.

He put his arm around her waist, and lifting her face with his open palm, laid her head back upon his shoulder, and looked down in her moist eyes.

"Forgive you? I could not do otherwise. I know to whom report gives Agnes, and from whom it originated —"

Peter Simpkins. Did you really credit the assertion, Edalia?"

"Yes."

"Then let me say to *you*, Edie, that I have never desired to be more than a *friend* to Agnes. Why how you tremble, little girl! And there's a sparkling pearl peeping out from its silken covert—and another! My *dear* Edie!"

Walter Eldon strained her to his bosom, and kissed her lips and forehead with more passion than he had ever displayed before.

Then he seated her on the sofa, and addressed her with brotherly seeming and confidence.

"No, Edalia, I have never loved Agnes; and even if it were not so—"

His lips compressed firmly—he rose and traversed the apartment.

"I should not marry for years to come. There are obligations to be repaid, before incurring a new responsibility."

His face grew white, and his form proudly erect. He resumed his seat beside her, and looked long and mournfully upon her face.

"Ah, Edie, before I can shake off the galling chains of dependence, *you* will be the bride of some favored one of fortune!"

"No, *I shall not*, Walter."

His countenance lighted up—his bosom swelled. He moved impulsively towards her, with words visible in his luminous, heavenly blue eyes, but subjecting his nervous faculties to the domination of a powerful will, he restrained his impulsiveness and conversed calmly and with fraternal seeming.

Walter had made his debut as a lawyer in Bertha's native town, and had triumphed.

Edalia now bethought her to inquire:

"Where is uncle?"

"He remained in town. Bertha is coming home with him to-morrow — her husband is gone."

Edalia sprang up and danced at the glad news of Bertha's coming, till the laughing young man caught her up in his arms, and carried her off in triumph to the supper-room as the bell sounded the call.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BERTHA RETROSPECTS THE PAST.

AM I?" Bertha uttered the words softly as she sat alone in her chamber, looking off at the pale golden stars spangling the broad blue of a slumberous June night — looking away out through the violet depths, yet seeing nothing but the dark lines drawn along the soiled leaf of her inner life.

"Am I?"

And the small mouth shut more firmly, and the small white hand wandered restlessly through the short, shining, brown curls that fluttered over her lily-white forehead, and the shadow of a thought was in the brown depths of her introverted eyes.

And what was Bertha thinking about? And what did the poor tired heart, beating time to the death-dirge of its ruined hopes, answer to the mysterious words:

"Am I?"

The poor tired heart gave a fuller throb, and sank away down under slow, soft pulses, and answered not a word — it

was afraid to utter what it felt, lest it should condemn itself. But "God, who is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things," heard the deep thoughts under those slow, soft pulses, and the spirit rapped out on the table of feeling the mystic monosyllable:

"No!"

And Bertha's brown eyes smiled very faintly as they looked off into the blue vista, thickly sown with stars, and mellow with moonlight; and the heart under those short, brown curls pulsed on with an even beat as thought rolled up in dark waves from the shadowy past, and ran in little silvery rills off through the slumberous eve and the mellow moonlight into the veiled future, and the poor tired heart asked, as it dreamed on and on all alone in the purpled eve-light:

"When will it end?"

Only one year of married life had gone, and Bertha wondered if the clouds and storms of that one, that had bruised and blighted her young life, would not suffice for the years that God's omnipotent hand might hold to fold around her future fate.

Horace Stanhope was gone, and the quiet that fell around her life was sweet to the heart that had so long struggled in the wild waves of discord and uncongeniality.

Day after day, his atheistic and tyrannical soul had crept from the deceptive covering that concealed it, until it stood forth in all its deformity and hideousness; and the little tendrils of wifely feeling that might have been nurtured by tender forbearance and manly worth into strong, vigorous vines of affection, trailing around his life and embowering it with cooling shade and sweet blossoms, fell away seared and blasted by the rude shock of his dishonorable and cruelly exacting nature.

Horace Stanhope was an atheist, and Bertha grew cold,

with sudden surprise and dread, as she drew forth the villainous works of Hume and Voltaire from their concealment among his effects, and made the shuddering discovery of her husband's masked principles. She consigned the iniquitous volumes to the flames, and reduced them to ashes without his knowledge. She did not wait to consider the consequences — Horace Stanhope never saw the wicked works again. He smiled when the deed was voluntarily acknowledged, and essayed to defend his faith. Bertha stood aghast at the sophistry employed to extenuate his great guilt. She was not "under grace" herself, but she had been taught from babyhood to say, "Our Father;" and her belief in a God was as strong and clear as the unclouded midsummer sun at noonday. She could not argue with him from experience, but she laid the Bible between them to decide the all-important question, and heard it sneeringly pronounced "a cunningly devised fable!" — an infidel's invariable resort.

Bertha never reasoned with him again on the subject, and Horace Stanhope made no effort and manifested no desire to proselyte his believing wife to his own unbelief. But he threw obstacles in the way of her church-going, until Bertha surmounted them with the strength of an unconquerable will, and successfully resisted his authority to shut her out from God's holy sanctuary. Her disobedience furnished him with a weapon with which to fight her own faith, and he bravely stabbed the religion that taught wives to defy their own husbands!

"'We should obey God, rather than man'" — was Bertha's parry to the vindictive thrust.

Horace Stanhope was kind and tender during his wife's long illness, and Mr. Belmont trusted to his great love to reform his nature and correct his evil tendencies. The son-in-law deferred openly to the old man's judgment and

advice, but secretly he chafed under the restraint that prudence laid upon necessity.

He was more than penniless, and Bertha's father established him in a flourishing mercantile business. His affable manners and handsome face rendered him popular, and prosperity perched upon his banner. The world called him a "lucky dog," and made merry over the "Yankee trick" he had played upon his credulous father-in-law.

But with Bertha's recovery, and appearance in society, the old unrest returned, and affairs grew darker daily, until they culminated in open rupture.

Mr. Belmont found, upon investigation, that Horace Stanhope's business prosperity, in which he was interested, was only upon the surface. The funds he had furnished to found the establishment were all expended or unaccountably invisible, and no profits forthcoming to replenish the stock! Horace Stanhope could not render a satisfactory account of the missing funds and lack of surplus, and the long forbearing, but now fully aroused father, turned the key in the store-door, and indignantly ordered the treacherous and worthless son-in-law from his premises. Mr. Belmont said, wrathfully:

"There is a point beyond which forbearance ceases to be a virtue!"

Horace Stanhope went up to Bertha's chamber, laid his wicked head upon her bosom, and wept tears of hate, and yearning for revenge—plaintively attributing them to an overwhelming sense of innocence, outraged by her unjust and unfeeling father!

Tears from her husband was no unusual sight to Bertha, and they failed to produce the desired effect. She had seen them fall from his large, soft, beautiful eyes on every occasion that policy found it expedient to awaken sympathy, until she had become disgusted at the unmanly resort. The

rain-drops that fell from Horace Stanhope's blue eyes had long won, in Bertha's home, the unenviable designation of "crocodile tears."

Bertha blushed with shame at the sound that reflected such discredit upon one in whom her own individuality was lost; but she knew the application was just, and she shrank farther within herself and from him.

Horace Stanhope saw the breach widening between them, and he grew more tyrannical and secretly violent. Bertha learned to fear him, not that he was brave and daring,—she knew he was the reverse of valiant,—but she distrusted the sting of the snake in the grass, in his hours of jealous rage, until her spirit rose one day, after her long confinement, when he sought to restrict her liberties to the narrow limits of his own jealous and arbitrary will, by incarcerating her from the world.

Horace Stanhope cowered before the spark of spirit-light struck out by the flint and steel of constant oppression and perpetual strife,—and Bertha knew her husband was a dastard as well as tyrant.

Bertha Belmont had said truly, when she wrote Edalia from LA VIOLET SEMINARY:

"I despise *meanness*. The very sight of a mean mortal nauseates me." And the daily view of a mean spirit, bearing so close a relationship to her, was wearing her powers of self-control and her very life away.

But Bertha was as easily led by love as she was repelled by unkindness; and her husband's returning tenderness and words of penitence covered, for a time, the multitude of sins that conduced to continually recurring clouds and storms in their domestic horizon.

And now that his chief aid in obtaining her hand had deserted and cast him off for his baseness, Horace Stanhope exerted his softest arts and sunniest wiles to win her from her home.

"It would be a blow to the old man, and his revenge!" he said, mentally; but Bertha heard the thought expressed, by his torturing lips, when it was too late to retrieve her loss!

"You promised never to take me from my home," she said, in answer to his pleadings.

"Without your consent, my wife."

"And *with* my consent you will not take me now, Mr. Stanhope. You have no means to provide for yourself, setting aside *my* expenses. It would be the part of prudence for me to remain, even if my inclination seconded your wish."

"You don't wish to go with your husband, Bertha?—driven out by those with whom you will remain! Dear, will you suffer me to leave you forever? I shall never return to this State when I am once out of it, Bertha."

"And I shall never leave this State, Mr. Stanhope, while my parents and brother are in it, without a great change that I fear will never come."

"What change, Bertha?"

"Recall the past of our married life, Mr. Stanhope, and ask yourself if it seem wise and desirable that I should abandon a quiet home and tender friends and go out into the wide world, a homeless stranger, with one who has not made my happiness in the past!"

"Dear, you will have no cause to complain, when you leave all and rely upon me. You have never been wholly mine yet, Bertha; you have been divided among many, and your love for and dependence upon others have occasioned the discord in the harmony of our wedded life."

Bertha's lips shut tightly. She would not reproach him for his unfaithfulness to her father, and enumerate his many acts of cruelty and violence to herself; but to resign all for him, to follow his fortunes in a strange land, with the sick-

ening odor of Hume and Voltaire exhaling from his spirit, was not in her thoughts.

"Will you go with your husband, my dear wife?"

All the softness and sweetness that Horace Stanhope could command were poured into those words, and it was pleasant to Bertha. He was on his knees, with his handsome head upon her shoulder and his arms around her waist. She was forgetting the past, and thinking perhaps it was her duty, and the future would reward her for the effort to perform it. He saw his advantage and followed it up with honeyed words. Hume and Voltaire were shut out from her vision by his enticing smiles.

"How can you obtain funds sufficient to take me?"

She looked down in his eyes. There was a steely flash and cold glitter of triumph that chilled her like ice.

"My brother in New York will furnish the needful," he said, exultingly.

"And how will you repay him?"

"I can obtain a situation in the city, no doubt."

"And if not?"

"There are no 'ifs' about it, Bertha; there are always openings there for one like me, who understands the salesman's business."

That resolved her back into herself. He understood the business so well that it had driven him from her father's house! She saw Hume and Voltaire again, and was no longer charmed by the charmer.

"Then go and obtain the situation, Mr. Stanhope. Repay all your pecuniary obligations; place yourself in a situation not to be embarrassed by my additional expenses; and if you then refuse to receive you here as a son-in-law, I will join you in New York."

Horace Stanhope grew white with disappointment and wrath. He loved his beautiful young wife as well as he was

capable of loving anything beside his sensual self; and the idea of leaving her among her old admirers for so long a period of probation, with no lynx-eye to follow her day in and day out, wrought him to fury. He did not consider it was his own misconduct that had driven him out;—he thought only of the necessity that was upon him. He learned to value her more, now that his sins had separated between him and his heart—for Horace Stanhope had a heart, though it was so grown over with the thorns of iniquity that the sharp points pierced its core, and tortured all that came in contact with it.

“Is that your determination, Bertha?”

She saw the premonitory symptoms of a violent eruption, in his whitening lips and swelling bosom, and tried to nerve herself for the burning lava of irrepressible passion.

“Mr. Stanhope, I cannot go with you now. You are not in a situation to manfully meet the liabilities that will be incurred by my compliance with your request. I should only be a burden.”

“Dear, with you I shall be strong to labor and wait; without you, it will be impossible to succeed. I shall *die* without you, Bertha!”

She had heard such assertions before, and knew how much they were worth when they had accomplished his object; but they did not fail to affect her sensibility almost to tears, under the circumstances.

“Mr. Stanhope, try it and see.”

“Is that your final answer, Bertha?”

“It is; but let us part peaceably, Horace. For your own sake you must go without me now. I am —”

“Yes, for my sake! for *my* sake! Good Lord, how considerate and loving she is! Go alone, because she loves me so! Try it and see! Yes, try it and die, and leave her free to Harry Herbert! — church-member Harry Herbert!

saintly Herbert! and the rest of the infernal scoundrels that she cares a damned sight more for than she does her husband! Oh, what a precious, immaculate, devoted wife she is!" — he sneered and hissed, as he walked the room in a white heat.

Bertha's face was white as his own, now. The taunt and sneer, and imputation cast upon her honor, in his wild frenzy, struck fire from the flint, and set her Southern spirit in a blaze of indignation.

"I never said I loved you, Mr. Stanhope," she answered, coolly.

He turned upon her fiercely, as the chilling words fell from her scornful lips.

"Then you *don't* love me, madam! You glory in your shame! You uttered a living lie at the bridal altar, and boast of it now!"

"I never said I loved you, Mr. Stanhope. You knew all before you made me your wife. I gave you timely warning and tried to avert this wretched fate, but you would not release me. I am not responsible for the unhappiness that has followed that fatal nineteenth of June. I could not control my destiny, and successfully strive against my fate — I was a child in stronger hands. It is folly to reproach me for what I vainly tried to avert. It is worse than folly to affect ignorance now, of what you knew from the beginning. I respected you when we were married, and I should have learned to love you, doubtless, had you watered the germ of affection with the cool dew of gentleness and nursing care, and not frozen it in its earth-bed with jealous tyranny, before the tender buds had put forth in the warm spring sunshine. You might have won me to love you once, but I do not even respect you now!"

Horace Stanhope's fury cooled off, as her burning eyes ate down into his passionate soul. He saw the game was up,

and he had "lost a day" without a lucky cut of his fortune cards. He went back to her side, and wet her shoulder with apparently penitential tears.

"Oh, Bertha, my wife, unsay those cruel words! It kills me to part with you, and you add to my misery by words of scorn!"

"A worm will turn if trodden upon, Mr. Stanhope. I said, let us part in peace, and you impelled me to self-justification by sneers and insulting insinuations. I am no angel, and you should not expect from me the unparalleled patience of a Job. I have earnestly tried to perform my duty as your wife, and I think you cannot cite one instance of disobedience, except in obeying Him to whom I owe my first allegiance. I am no Christian in experience, and have not the forbearance of a saint. I regret that you have driven me to this extremity; let us forgive and forget the past, and mutually try to cultivate a better spirit in the future."

"You will not forget me, Bertha, when I am so far away?"

"I shall never forget you, Horace," was all she said.

And so they parted — with mutual tears and pardons; he, crushed down by the necessity of leaving her — a necessity brought about by his own wickedness — and yearning for vengeance upon his justly incensed father-in-law.

And Bertha sat alone in the dewy eve-light, and asked her heart if it was sad because Horace Stanhope was far away, and the sound of his footsteps was no longer heard in her quiet home, and his words of love and jealousy, and wild passion, no longer soothed and irritated and tormented her. But the tired heart sank down half reprovingly, and did not answer, audibly, the low query:

"Am I?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BERTHA'S FRIENDS AND FOES.

MISS WATRUFF was married, and gone from "the Academy" at the "Grove." Miss Watruff had "caught" a handsome young Southron, with her black eyes and musical talent, and her Northern principles did not scruple to marry a dozen negroes and a good round share of profanity.

Windsor Burleigh was handsome and rich, but not aristocratic. His beauty compensated for a deficiency in mental acquirements, and his wealth covered all constitutional sins and hereditary transmissions from Miss Watruff's wide-awake eye.

What a world of inconsistencies there is on the outside of this beautiful but snake-bitten earth!

Go North, and you hear little else but slavery denounced and slaveholders anathematized.

Go South, and you see wandering, money-hunting Yankees marrying the "institution" as rapidly as they can wheedle silly girls and sillier women into the absurdity of saying "Yes!"

Miss Watruff met her match in the matrimonial state, and was richly repaid for her injustice and unfeeling deportment towards little Bertha in years gone by. The "measure she meted" to her unoffending young pupil was "measured to her again."

Windsor Burleigh and "Bertha the Beauty" were schoolmates and "sweethearts" in childhood days; and our heroine knew, when she heard of his marriage, *he* would not be crushed by coldness, and hurt by insults, from his fair

bride, as she had been, by her servile teacher, in other years.

Windsor walked rough-shod over small things, and beat down large ones with powerful oaths and tobacco-quids, that made even stubborn hearts quail. Bertha liked the youth, but feared his strong language; and his manhood's soul was as strong as his school-day words. Windsor's wife died before she broke her husband's heart.

Dora Wilmer was now a "finished young lady," with many lovers of her father's fortune fluttering around his delicate daughter. Dora was not handsome in the slightest degree, saving her long, black, silky eye-lashes, that lent a peculiar interest to her pale blue eyes. She was dainty in person, and tricked out in all the glittering paraphernalia that country wealth could procure.

Dora was really a good girl at heart; apart from her mother's influence, she was an amiable, lovable woman. She was destitute of vanity, and cared no more for men and manners than a child in pantalets and short frock.

If a lord of creation in broadcloth and shining boots, with Chesterfield grace and dignity, careful to please the "young heiress," urged her to favor him with music against her inclination, Dora would "swear she would n't!" and her singular style of expression was set down by her host of admirers to "privilege" and "peculiarity."

There was a handsome carriage standing at the yard-gate of the "Grove." Ellen Wilmer was the occupant, and her little boy and a black nurse. Mrs. Ellen Wilmer had just arrived from Williamsville, and stopped a while at her uncle's gate on her way to the "old place." She evidently had news. Colonel Wilmer, wife, and daughter, were standing near the carriage. Mrs. Ellen Wilmer was speaking fast, with pleased eyes.

"Bertha Belmont's husband has run away and left her."

"I thought so. I knew nobody could live with her in peace!" and Mrs. Colonel Wilmer clasped her bony hands and looked strangely unsympathizing.

"Oh, la!" ejaculated Dora, stretching her pale eyes, soberly.

"Damn him!" muttered the Colonel, looking daggers at his smiling wife.

Mrs. Ellen went on, glibly:

"He's stole all old Belmont's money, and broke him up root and branch, and run off from his wife, who is breaking her heart about him, and the disgrace of the whole affair. They say they've lived like cat and dog ever since their marriage. Old Belmont let it all out after Stanhope stole his money and put out for Yankee-land."

"I wonder he didn't kick him out, neck and heels, before he ran off," snarled the Colonel. "The Lord knows I never liked the looks of the fellow; handsome he was, to be sure, but there was a sneaking, snaky look about the rascal that I never liked; and they say Bertha married him against her will; her father fancied him — I've heard so."

"Fudge!" sneered Mrs. Colonel Wilmer, "don't you believe it! She never would have done better! I pity the man if he is a Yankee! I know her — the poor and proud impudent fire-eater!"

"Now, Helen!" warned her liege, "don't say 'fire,' when you've got enough of it yourself, and some to spare. Bertha was a wonderfully smart girl, with just spirit enough to defend herself and her rights. I never liked poor people who would lie down in the dirt, and let rich ones walk over 'em. 'Bertha the Beauty' won't do that, you may bet! The fellow's a scoundrel, and the poor girl deserves a better fate. I've heard sly rumors about his dishonesty and jealousy of his wife's beauty. I s'pose they tried to keep it in and

hide his meanness. I'd like to twist the rope that would hang him, by ——!"

Colonel Wilmer was not a profane man habitually, and it was only on occasions of unusual excitement that the forbidden words slipped out.

"Poor Bert! I'm *re-al* sorry for her!" and Dora's face testified to her truthfulness despite her mother's angry eyes.

"That's right, my girl, always talk up for the right."

Colonel Wilmer's great clumsy arms gave Dora a good hug for her honesty, and his good-natured mouth met hers with a "buss" that might have been heard at a considerable distance.

Mrs. Ellen Wilmer's carriage rolled away from the Grove, and Dora ordered the ponies out for a horseback ride. Dora was overflowing with the great news, and must pour it out to Edalia and Minnie, before her blue eyes could rest in slumber.

She had outgrown her childish envies and jealousies, and forgiven the snaps and snarls of juvenility. Her father's disposition was more perceptible in the young lady than it had been in the little girl. Dora sprang upon the pony's back, and throwing a kiss from her fingers to her fat and lazy father, who was stretched upon the porch settee, with a little negro kneeling at his head, cracking hairs, she galloped away from the Grove and up the broad, white road, with black Harry on the match pony, following hard behind his young mistress.

Minnie was sitting with Edalia, when Dora burst in without the slightest ceremony, in her "peculiar" and "privileged" way.

"Oh, Ed — Min, that rascal Stanhope from Yankeedom has run away and left Bert, and stole all her father's money to boot!"

"I don't believe it," said Edalia.

"That 's Yankee-like!" exclaimed Minnie. "Poor Bert!"

"Yes, poor Bert!—*I* say, poor Bert! She looked like a ghost when I saw her last spring, and I heard some whisper of the Yankee's jealous tyranny; but I set it down to servants' slanders. I see now what made her so thin and pale — poor thing!"

Dora's eyes looked suspiciously lustrous.

"Maybe it is n't true," suggested incredulous Edalia.

"No guess-work about it. Cousin Ellen has just come from town and brought the sorry news. I'm glad he's gone, I declare, if he had n't stole Bert's money, and broke her heart! Cousin El says she's dying about him, and the disgrace he's brought upon her — poor Bert!"

"Don't be distressed about that," said Edalia, mysteriously. "I reckon Bertha's health will improve speedily; and as to the 'disgrace,' I predict it will follow him, and not tarry with her. But did he really run off?"

"Yes; Cousin El says he's broke Mr. Belmont root and branch, and run away with the money. And you know that will injure Bert's reputation, if her husband has run away from her — poor Bert!"

"I doubt it. There are two sides to this affair, and we have only seen one. Wait a little till the whole story is out. I'll write to Bertha to-night."

But Edalia did not have to wait long for the whole story.

Mr. Tomlin was in her uncle's office, communicating the whole truth to Mr. Redmond and Walter. He had just returned from Williamsville. They entered the apartment, where the three friends sat discussing the same subject.

Mr. Redmond broke forth, jubilantly:

"I say, Ed, Yankee Belmont has kicked Yankee Stanhope out o' doors, and he's clean gone, forever! Hang 'im, let 'im go!"

"I said so!" cried Edalia.

"And a good riddance for her!" exclaimed Minnie.

"Cousin Ellen said he stole all Mr. Belmont's money and ran away from Bert!" said Dora, in amazement.

"Cousin Ellen has got hold of the tail instead of the head," said Mr. Tomlin, roughly. "Instead of running away from his wife, he tried hard to get her to follow him! But 'Bertha the Beauty' had cut her eye-teeth, and would n't budge an inch for his tears and prayers."

"I thought so," reiterated Edalia, significantly.

"Good for Bert!" ejaculated Minnie, with a sad smile on her sickly-looking face.

"Well, I'm *re-al* glad Cousin El got the wrong story," said Dora.

"Some folks always take snap judgment," growled Mr. Tomlin. "I got my story from Mr. Belmont, and no mistake. The easy old man has got his eyes open at last, and his dander is up — no two ways about *that*!"

"Then he did n't steal her money?" inquired Miss Dora.

"Not exactly as you put it, but it amounts to the same thing when you whittle it to a point. The goods are gone; debts to pay in New York, and no proceeds from the sale of 'value received' to pay 'em with. If that ain't twin sister to theft, I should call it first cousin on both sides. Belmont had to pay for the clothes he married his daughter in — the sneaking, mean-spirited Yankee rascal! He was jealous as a Turk, just because his wife was so beautiful and universally admired, and tried to shut her up from all the world, even from church. But Bert showed her grit *there*, and he could n't come *that* game. She was always a remarkably modest and religious little thing, and would n't give in to bein' left in the lurch *there* — you may bet! I hope she flattened his Yankee nose for it! He kept the whole family in a stew, everlastingly, and handled that poor

child pretty roughly, in his jealous rage; then he'd snub like a booby, and beg her pardon on his knees. Now he's been kicked out of the house, and left her father his debts to pay; and no one knows what has gone with the money, for the rascal did a flourishing business. I wonder they stood it with him as long as they did. *I should a come down on 'im, long ago, like a fence-rail on a green snake!*"

"I should n't think *Bertha Belmont* would *love* such a biped as *that!*" said Edalia, nodding her curly head significantly at Dora.

"*Love* him! *Cre-ation!* Belmont coaxed her into marrying him, in the first place, — and now he's got paid for his sin. I did n't git *that* from *him*, though, you may bet high! It was all over town before her marriage, they say, but kept dark; and now that Belmont has let the cat out, nobody scruples to revive the old story and censure him. Nobody can tell where the tale sprung, but niggers have keen eyes and big ears. *Love* him, indeed! '*Bertha the Beauty*' ain't cut after that pattern! I saw her this morning, pretty and timid as ever, but careworn. She longs for the old days and early friends. Her brown eyes filled brimful of tears when she spoke of the low brown house with the long piazza."

"Poor thing!" said Edalia, shutting her mouth very tight.

"Poor Bert!" echoed Minnie, wiping the tears from her faded eyes.

"I wish he'd lost his breath before he ever came South!" snapped out Dora, growing very white.

"A bad penny's pretty apt to come back again, and I hope Bertha won't think it her bounden duty to stick the closer to a bad bargain, if the rascal turns up again. If she *does* she'll *do* it, you may bet your pile on *that!*" growled Mr. Tomlin, as he strode out of the house and away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

EDALIA SURPRISES MR. REDMOND. — NIGHT-SCENE AT
"JONES'S STORE."

AND so Agnes has returned?" said Mr. Redmond, as he lolled back in his easy-chair before a blazing winter fire, with feet elevated to an astonishing height upon the mantel. "Only went to play bridesmaid for a cousin, eh? and disappoint the wiseacres hereabouts. Wonder what the busybodies'll scare up next, Wall, my boy? But, by Jupiter, I thought so, too! and p'rhaps 'tain't too late yet?"

He looked askance at the young man. Walter colored.

"I shall never marry Agnes, sir."

"Eh?"

The old gentleman's eyes snapped, and his heels slid down the mantel right nimbly, and brought up on the fender with a ring.

"Eh? well, by Jupiter! I thought it was a fixed fact, and so schooled myself accordingly. Did n't you, Ed?"

"No, sir."

"You did n't! Then what *did* you think, you gipsy, eh?"

"That I received my information from a reliable source, uncle."

"Oh, ho! So Agnes let the cat out, and bound you over to keep mum?"

"No, sir. Agnes never alluded to the subject."

"Hallo! — what the deuce!"

He looked from Walter to her, and from her to Walter.

"Well, I'm an old man, but I'll be hanged if I can *read* yet!" and Mr. Redmond made a hasty exit, with a juvenile step and roguish smile.

Edalia bent over her sewing industriously, and there was

a long pause. When she looked up she met the young man's deep, earnest eyes riveted half mournfully upon her face. He started slightly, smiled, and drew out his watch.

"Seven, Edalia; it is time, if you would call for Agnes."

Di's nimble fingers speedily performed their accustomed office, and they started for the old school-house.

"Are you cold, Edalia?" queried Walter, as they approached the establishment of Tomlin memory; wrapping her furs around her till she gasped for breath, and peeping cunningly under at her half-buried visage.

"No; but I shall be if you go on at this rate! I'll thank you for a little more air. I hope Mr. Tomlin will be there, Walter." }

"So do I, indeed."

"Tomlin—Tomlin," repeated Mr. Redmond, who was growing a little deaf, and, consequently, a little more inquisitive than formerly,—"what of Tomlin, young ones? A noble fellow, in the main, but has a termagant wife, I'm told, and flies to the bottle for refuge."

"A roofless refuge," returned Walter, with a sigh.

"So it is, boy—so it is; the frying-pan and the fire; but thousands of poor wretches have taken the leap, impelled by domestic discord; and Tomlin, though possessing the elements of—by faith, there's Charles!"

They stopped mechanically; and among the crowd gathered beneath the low roof of "Jones's Store," they discerned Chester,—his face flushed with excitement evidently,—Mr. Tomlin, Colonel Henley, and Peter Simpkins.

"Edalia, I must resign you to uncle. Charles must not remain here."

"Oh, *don't* enter that den, Walter,—remember 'poor Tray!'"

He looked down with his beaming blue eyes brimming with soft and silent eloquence.

"And remember Daniel, Edie. I *must* exercise my powers of persuasion. Go with uncle, little trembler, and believe me not too brave to fly from danger."

He resigned her to Mr. Redmond, with a lingering pressure of the hand that lay upon his arm, and sprang up the steps, with a happy smile upon his handsome face.

A shout went up from the bacchanal crew within, as the door closed upon his tall, manly form.

"By Jupiter, here's a pretty stew!" ejaculated Mr. Redmond.

"Why, how you tremble! Are you cold, Ed?"

"Not a bit, sir. But I don't like this business, uncle. Walter will stir up this whole nest of vipers by his cold-water presence, and I fear for the consequences."

"That's a fact, girl. Come round this corner from the keen air, Ed, and let's watch the signs of the times through this loophole of a window. It's a blasted mean trick this eavesdropping; but I'll be hanged by the ears if I'm going to leave the boy in this fix! I'm bound to see fair play, if the odds *are* against us. There's Henley—his animosity is burning for vengeance, and he'll scruple at nothing to accomplish his object, and involve him in an 'affair of honor.' '*H-o-n-o-r!*' If he does succeed, by the beard of Joe Smith, I'll—" He doubled up his fist, and looked at it pugnaciously.

During this effervescence of the old gentleman's indignation and solicitude, Edalia was watching anxiously the gyrations of the motley crew within. She descried Walter at the farther end of the room in low but earnest conversation with Charles, whose varying countenance betrayed his mental excitement.

"Gen'lemen," said the intoxicated and reeling Peter, "walk up'n lay this unction t'y'r inner man. I'll stan' treat. *Dum viv' mus vi'amus*, gen'lemen, 'n go to glory w'en we shuf-fle off (hic!) this mor-mor-tal coil (hic!)"

Mr. Tomlin turned off a surprising quantity of gold-colored liquid in answer to this invitation, smacked his lips with a relish over the empty tumbler, and made a snake-track in the direction of Charles and Walter. He brought one hand down heavily upon Charles's shoulder, and stammered out:

"Go 'long, man, 'n no sneakin'! Wall's right, 'n no mistake; for I tell you, fellers, there's death in the pot, 'n no 'Lisha to tend it!"

Walter addressed him in a low, indistinct tone. He wrung the young man's proffered hand, and responded:

"Can't do it, boy, — can't do it! I'll own I ought to; but you see the devil got into my pea-patch, an' pulled up all the vines, 'fore the resolutions ripened — raised a rum-pus gin'rally, an' I jest let go the ropes, an' — an' 'm goin' down the hill to hell in desp'ration! Can't do it, boy, — God bless ye though, I know you 're right!"

"Oh, yes!" cried the insulting Henley. "Go it, Tom! turn the grindstone for the able disciple of Coke!"

Mr. Redmond's fingers shut around Edalia's arm like a vice at this taunt. The blood ran icy through her veins, and she held her breath to catch his reply.

Walter's face was livid, but not a muscle moved as he turned coolly, and bowed to the Colonel, with a slight curl of his chiselled lip.

Henley chafed.

"Bravo, my boy!" whispered Mr. Redmond, rubbing his hands with delight. "Treat him with silent contempt. 'A wise man prevaieth in power, for he screeneth his battering-engine; but a fool tilteth headlong, and his enemy is aware.'"

A ragged inebriate, in the highest state of *spirit*-ual felicity, squared himself in the middle of the aisle, and commenced a circular movement, catching at the bystanders to

preserve a perpendicular posture, when the law of gravitation became too powerful for his weak head to resist, and he sang, jubilantly :

“Old Father Matthew an’ I,
 ’Ow merry were we,
 W’en we sot un’er the June apple t’ee —
 Ei’o !
 Put ’is ’at on ’is ’ead,
 Keep ’is ’ead warm,
 An’ take ’nother d’ink ’ll do ’im no ’arm —
 Ei — (hic !) ”

He staggered up to the counter, and acted upon the suggestion, — emptied a brimming glass that descended from his nerveless hand with a concussion that shivered it to atoms.

The dealer in sundries anathematized the whole race of bipeds, collectively, at this casualty ; whereupon the offender struck a pugilistic attitude, but lost his equilibrium, and disappeared behind the counter, to the terror of numerous toes that retaliated for their excruciating agonies by well-directed and hearty kicks at the prostrated flounderer.

“Gen’lemen,” said Peter, “I’m single man, gen’lemen, or you would n’t see me ’n this disrep’table condition. I know I’m drunk, feller-cit’zens, but I’ve no wife (hic!) to mourn over my d’plo’able condition ’n ’nfatuation, like Ches’er yon’er (hic!) I’m free ’n easy bach’lor, gen’lemen, ’n the ’njoymen’ of all the ’munities of that f’lic’tous state, *ad lib’tum*. Walk up, *cum dign’tate*, gen’lemen, ’n drink to the d’liv’rance of all beauteous brides from a drunken incubus (hic!) I’ll be ’sponsible, gen’lemen.”

Edalia glanced at Charles. His countenance changed rapidly — alternate red and white. Walter grasped his arm, and they moved toward the door. Mr. Tomlin tottered after, sputtering words of encouragement to Charles; and Henley sneered.

Mr. Tomlin saw them safely shut out, but resisting Walter's importunities to accompany them, he returned to the counter.

"I say, Clutchem, it's all-fired cold out. Give us 'nother neck-warmer. I'm goin' to take one good leg-stretcher, an' then strike a bee-line for purgatory!"

"Poor Tomlin!" said Mr. Redmond, as they turned away from "Jones's Store."

CHAPTER XXX.

ALONZO STANHOPE'S VISIT TO BERKSHIRE.

THE "farm," behind the dilapidated frame house, in Berkshire, Massachusetts, was seamed with yellow ridges; and the evening air was redolent with the odor of new hay.

The cows were chewing their cud in the yard, exhaling the scent of fresh milk, and the pig was munching and grunting in its savory pen.

Martha Stanhope, flushed and weary-looking, was preparing the evening meal of pork and pickles, cakes and pies — *and tea*; and Silas washing his big feet and brown hands at the "sink," after his day's labor of haying and milking was done; when the sound of wheels, drawing up at the gate, provoked him to desist from the process of ablution, and listen.

Silas "peeked" through the window, and started up very suddenly, exclaiming with animation:

"Wall, ef there ain't 'Lonzo, come up from New Yorick, I swan!"

He stepped on the towel, and with sundry scrapes and wriggles, to absorb the wet and avoid tracking the floor, he hurried from the kitchen out to the gate, with one clean foot and one dirty, hair standing on end, and suspenders flapping behind him.

Alonzo Stanhope, another brother of Horace, was a small, delicate man, with an air of city refinement about him. His hands and feet were small; his dress *à la mode*; and his language pruned of all Yankee provincialisms. His pale chestnut hair was slightly dusted with years; his light-blue eyes had an open, frank expression, and a perpetual smile sat upon the ingenuous, manly face. His *toute ensemble* was that of a man that could be trusted.

Alonzo was a land-broker on Nassau Street, New York, and doing a prosperous business. There was a striking, painful contrast between the city gentleman and the country clown, whose big, hard hand he was shaking so cordially. Not the slightest resemblance existed between the two indicative of fraternity, except in stature and the color of their eyes.

Silas conducted his unexpected visitor into the "keepin'-room" — which was a large, unfinished apartment, very plain in its appointments and slender in details.

A home-made carpet, a dozen chairs — noticeable only for substantiality — a small table supporting a smaller looking-glass, and a large bed in one corner, made up the inventory of Silas Stanhope's "keepin'-room."

Martha Stanhope pulled down her calico sleeves over her red arms, and directing Newton, the oldest boy, to prevent the feline domestic from depredating upon the table — or, in Martha's own phraseology, to "keep that narsty cat from hookin' his grub!" — she hurried out to the "keepin'-room."

"Wall, neow, ef yeou don't beat all, 'Lonzo! — poppia' in 'pon a body without a bit o' warnin,' when we hain't got

marthin' nice enough for city folks! I be glad to see ye, though. Where's Hannah?"

Hannah was Alonzo's wife.

The city brother replied, that Hannah was partially necessitated to remain at home, as Horace was up from North Carolina, and "stopping" at his house. His face was very grave as he communicated this information. Yankee inquisitiveness was wide awake.

"Yeou don't say!" ejaculated Silas.

"I want tew know!" cried Martha. "Be his wife along?"

"No!" with a mysterious shake of the head.

Silas and Martha were fully aroused. They looked at each other intelligently, and back at the sober face from the city.

"Screw loose?" suggested Silas.

"Muss?" inquired Martha. "Dew tell!"

"I don't clearly comprehend the business myself. Horace has failed in Carolina, and come on alone. He says his wife would have accompanied him but for her father's threats, of whom she is childishly afraid. But that cistern don't hold water, for the law gives a man his wife, and no one can withhold her from him, if she is disposed to follow. There's something behind the face of affairs that I can't ferret out. Horace says his wife is devoted to him, but her father is his foe, for some incomprehensible cause."

"P'raps Bertha is afraid of losing the old man's money," suggested Silas.

"Pooh!—all made up by Horace's pride. Belmont's entire possessions won't amount to seventeen thousand dollars, and he has two children. Cooley, of the firm of 'Cooley & Harman,' with whom Horace has dealt in carrying on his business in the South, has recently returned from Williamsville, and gives an unvarnished statement. Belmont is a Yankee himself, and has not made a fortune in North

Carolina. Horace acknowledges the truth, now, and treats his deception as a pleasant joke! He's my brother — and I'm sorry to say it — but the handsome dog is unprincipled and shameless!"

"Them's my sentiments, chuck through! You remember that saddle, 'Lonzo?" said Silas, with an indignant scowl.

Alonzo Stanhope first smiled, then his white, even teeth shone through his parting lips, and his broadcloth and satin shook with silent risibility. He never laughed aloud.

"Silas 'll never forgive Horace for that Indian gift!" tittered Martha, shutting her eyes tight as she laughed.

"I had a use for that saddle, an' Horace owed me more 'n it was worth; an' I swan tew man, if it wern't mean!" said Silas, waxing hot as he thought of his loss.

"That's only a fisherman's luck," returned Alonzo, trying to suppress his mirthful emotions and look grave. "He owes me more than I suppose he will ever repay; for he's come on without means sufficient to pay his board, and relies upon his brothers for present aid. I've got him into the store with Allyn, but how long he'll stay is problematical. Horace is too erratic and improvident ever to succeed in business, I'm afraid."

"Like as not, his wife ain't as harnsome as he tells, either," suggested Martha, now fully sceptical.

"Yes, he told the truth there, for once. It was her rare beauty that went to his heart — for Horace is deeply in love with his wife — no question about that; and I hope his affection for her will reform him at last. He is evidently very unhappy, and exceedingly anxious to make money enough to return to Williamsville and set up business independently of her father, whom he hates for reasons not satisfactory to my mind, as I can gather them. Mr. Cooley will go South again in September, and I rely upon him for the whole truth of this strange affair. There's something

untold, or Horace would not have left his wife, and suffer so severely for it as he evidently does."

"Horace is dreadful jealous - minded — maybe," — and Martha left her hearers to fill up the blank.

"That is my fear, from some things that have incidentally transpired. Horace throws all the blame upon Belmont; but my impression is, Bertha would hand it over to him. It's a mixed up mess, anyhow, and one can't depend upon Horace for straightforward facts."

"I said he'd get burnt, when I heard of his marriage," chimed in Silas, taking it for granted the suggestion was correct. "They say them Southern folks eat fire and spit it out regular, when they git riled."

"An' Horace is pooty well calculated tew rile a body's temper, if they've got any worth mentionin' — I swan!"

"Be you certain that Bertha is harnsome as Horace tells?" persisted Martha, whose incredulity and woman's curiosity were fully aroused.

"Mr. Cooley bears him out in that assertion. He saw Bertha after a long illness, and confirms Horace's declaration, notwithstanding her loss of bloom and vigor. She is celebrated for her beauty wherever she is known, and had a host of suitors when she married, despite her lack of wealth. Cooley vows she has the sweetest and most charmingly lovely face he ever beheld; and her form is faultless."

"I swan!" said Silas, jerking out one foot to shake down his pants.

"Dew tell neow!" echoed Martha, with eyes full of interest in her Southern sister. "Did n't Horace paint her with his tongue, 'Lonzo? — tell us, neow — dew!"

"She has rich brown, modest eyes, that melt and brighten with every varying emotion; golden - brown curls that catch sunbeams in their coils, and dance and ripple over a dainty lily-fair neck and shoulders, and around a delicate

face, snow-white and modest as a violet. Horace says her mouth was just made for kissing—small, velvety, and peach-hued — and if I ever have an opportunity, I 'll try it on !”

“Yeou 'd better not neow !” warned Martha, as soberly as though Alonzo were about to execute his threat. “Horace will git mad as a March hare, and jealous as a Chinees — that 's so !”

“Pooh ! not of his brother, I guess !”

“Makes no difference who ; it's bred in the bone with Horace, and can't come out of the flesh. I never *did* see the beat of that boy !” said Silas, on whose ‘farm’ Horace had worked.

“Well,” inquired Martha, who was not yet satisfied, “is she little or large ?”

“Child-like in proportions, a little below the medium height, slender, and willowy as a lily-stem. Horace says he carries her about in his arms ‘like a doll.’”

“Wall, I 'd like tew see the child — I swan !” said Silas, pulling his suspenders over his shoulders and fastening them in front ; “but I have my doubts if she 'll ever follow Horace this fur. I 'm afraid he's got crooked down there, an' never 'll git straightened eout. How about supper, mother ?”

“Good land, if I did n't forgit ! And jest as like as not, Newt 's gone, and the cat 's took the table and cleaned the cubberd !”

“And I 'm hungry as a bear,” laughed Alonzo, as she hurried away.

Martha Stanhope found her tired boy fast asleep beside the baby's cradle, and old Tabby lord of the tea-table, and lapping the cream to his thirsty heart's content.

“Git eout ! s'boy ! shu !” shouted Martha, clapping her hands and stamping her feet furiously, — forgetting, in her excitement, the usual word of command to a feline offender.

Old Tabby cleared the room at two bounds, and made his escape through a rear window, with very straight tail and dropped ears, and slackened not his speed till he attained the summit of the "stunheap," where he sat down and licked his whiskers complacently, looking back defiance at his wrathful mistress, who shook her fist and sent shrill anathemas after him from his point of egress.

Newt was effectually roused by the hubbub occasioned by his negligence, and comprehending the unwholesome state of surrounding circumstances at one startled glance, he made his escape through the back-door on all fours, before Martha's ready hand could reach his ears as a "constitutional amendment."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THE DOVE HAS RETURNED TO THE ARK."

I WONDER if Charles is going to that meeting?" muttered Mr. Redmond, incredulously, as they hurried toward the hall of convention, where they arrived—accompanied by Agnes—a moment before Walter and Charles entered, arm in arm.

They stationed themselves on a vacant bench, immediately in front of Mr. Redmond's party—Charles wearing every appearance of a culprit going to execution.

His presence produced a universal commotion among the crowd; surprise and curiosity became visible in each face familiar with the young man's previous course.

A nervous start and happy flush indicated the amazement and pleasure of Agnes.

Walter turned and bestowed upon Edalia a glance of triumph from his bright, glad eyes.

A thrilling discourse was delivered by an elderly man with long flowing hair and slightly bowed form, whose personal experience was the most prominent and touching feature.

He told of the high hopes of early manhood — of a fair and gentle girl who plighted her troth with him at the holy altar; whose love, like the green vine around the forest-oak, blossomed through storms as in sunshine. He depicted his downward tendency from the pedestal of dignity and joy to the dark abyss of degradation and woe — only awaking from his lethargy to miss, forever, the soothing hand upon his brow of her whom he had destroyed! She slept in the quiet churchyard, the innocent victim of the simoom of Intemperance!

Symptoms of restlessness were manifest in Charles during the exordium, but the peroration found him with chin resting upon his hand, and dark eyes riveted wildly upon the speaker.

The orator closed with the admonition:

“Man — made in the image and likeness of God! Man, fallen and degenerate man! By the memory of the mother who watched over your wayward and helpless infancy, and who, perchance, slumbers now in silence and shade, where no word from her warning lips can come to plead with her darling boy, to stay his steps from ruin and wretchedness; by the memory of the glad and girlish bride whose tender arms entwined you in manhood’s fair morn, ere the dark clouds of sorrow and desolation rose from the death-sea of intoxication, and rolled over the sunny horizon of your peaceful and prosperous years, raining destruction upon your Eden of life and love; by the helpless ones, whose onward way in this world of strife will be darkened by your

shadow, or brightened by your beams; and by the still small voice that whispers in the winds and the waves, in the blue sky, and the green earth:

‘It is not all of life to live,
Nor all of death to die,’ —

arouse from your apathetic slumber, and exercise the powers with which God has endowed you, ere the last bud of your heart’s joy and pride falls from your side to the voiceless tomb, and you awake, *too late*, and go forth a lone wanderer in the pathway of life, with REMORSE written upon your memory, — *alone — like your speaker!*”

He sat down, and the deep hush that succeeded was at length broken by the light footfalls of the official members.

Walter grasped the Pledge and presented it to Charles. He gazed at it silently and undecisively a moment, put forth his hand to receive it, but drew it back quickly, and a deep flush overspread his face.

Walter sat down, laid his arm over Charles’s shoulder, and spoke fast and earnestly.

Edalia grew cold with suspense, and the brown eyes of Agnes looked icy. Charles sat like a stoic — stately and frigid. He had once said: “It is easier to resist than to reform.”

“Gave it to me, Mither Eldon,” said a weather-beaten son of the Emerald Isle, with a rich brogue, reaching his hard, sun-burnt hand across Charles, and drawing his threadbare coat-sleeve across his watery eyes; — “be the powers, an’ *I’ll* sign, yer honor. Mike Murphy can’t stan’ the likes o’ that, yer worship. Be the memory o’ me ould mither that’s dead and gone — the houly Mary rest ’er sowl! — I’ll make a clane breast of it, yer honor, an’ the whiskey may go to the divil — faith!”

He seized the paper, and wrote his name in large, round

characters, with a big bright tear rolling slowly down a deep furrow in his careworn cheek.

Charles's stern features relaxed, as he looked upon this drop of affection to the memory of a lost mother, warm from the heart of this old time-tossed mariner on life's rough sea; he received it from his brown, toil-hardened hand, and traced his own name beneath with tremulous fingers.

Mr. Redmond grasped a hand of each with a vigorous shake, and a "Bravo, by Jupiter!"

Charles drew himself up, with a long respiration, as though relieved of an oppressive burden, and a faint smile flitted over his features.

Agnes laughed, with the round tears sparkling in her young eyes, like dewdrops in spring sunshine; while Edalia's face was hidden from view; and Walter went through the crowd with a firm, proud step, and quiet smile upon his radiant face.

As they retired from the room, Edalia observed her uncle cast a searching, eager glance back upon the orator of the evening, with a melancholy expression in his wistful eye. Mr. Redmond's face had the seeming of one living in the past, oblivious of the present, as he turned from that searching gaze at the stranger's countenance, and Edalia knew he sighed softly as they passed out of the old school-house.

"Go in first, Edalia," begged Charles, as they arrived at the door of Minnie's apartment. She obeyed.

Minnie stood bending over the cherub form of little Charlie, fast asleep in his cradle-bed, with one chubby arm thrown backward, and nestling among the short, golden curls of his cunning little head, peeping brightly out from its snug, warm nest, "a thing of beauty," and "a joy forever," to the pale watcher beside it.

"Minnie dear, the Dove has returned to the Ark!"

The young mother and heart-broken wife looked at her friend wildly, till comprehending the blissful reality, as Charles entered smiling, she sprang forward with a low, glad cry, and fainted in his clasping arms.

“‘There is more joy over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance,’” said Walter, as they went from the happy pair to Mr. Redmond’s bachelor home.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“A BAD PENNY SURE TO COME BACK.” — BITTER MOMENTS. — BERTHA SEES “A FACE.”

STANHOPE’S come!”

A little chill crept from Bertha’s bounding heart, and ran frosty through her frame, as Mr. Belmont, with sober face and slightly vexed tone, made the sudden announcement.

“Pa!” was all she said.

“Now we shall have it, *ad nauseam*,” continued Mr. Belmont, growing indignant, as he thought of the past, and anticipated the future. “Stanhope has no fear of God or shame of man, and no reputation to lose in this community, and his vindictive spirit will do its worst to foment disturbance in this family. As Job said of the day of his birth, I now say of the day you married him: ‘Let it not be numbered with the days of the year’!”

Mr. Belmont at last realized fully his great error and wrong in influencing his daughter to unite her destiny with one of whom she knew nothing and cared less. He knew

it was all the work of his own hands, and yet he set his wits to work to obviate the calamity of seeing his only and idolized daughter go forth from the safe shelter of his roof with the worthless husband *he* had chosen.

It was a bitter reflection to the erring old man, now that he feared for the future.

"I only hope he won't remain long in this section," he proceeded, as he walked the floor restlessly, and speculated upon the result of Stanhope's wiles to win his wife away. "If the fellow had gone to Ballyhack, we might have lived in peace; but now we shall have crocodile tears, Pharisaic prayers, and promises strong as Goliath in seeming, but fragile as a pipe-stem in reality. I know the man!"

"Well," after a long pause, and silent pondering as his firm feet traversed the apartment, "I have no authority to control you now, my child; but if you suffer yourself to be deluded, and actuated by false promises and apparent penitence, I feel confident, from my knowledge of the man's principles, you will see the day you will regret your weakness in relying upon one so base!"

Bertha went up to her chamber and sat down by the window, where six months ago she had asked herself if she was sad, for that Horace Stanhope was far away; and shrank, half afraid, from the feeling answer. Now she asked her heart if it was glad because Horace Stanhope had returned, and Bertha could not define the feelings that ebbed and flowed in her searching soul.

His handsome face and *fond unkindness* (Bertha could only translate it thus) rose up vividly before her young vision, and she smiled. Then his dishonesty and falsehood, his atheism, his jealous tyranny, stood out in full and formidable proportions, and her fair brow contracted with inward pain and foreboding.

"If he were only a Christian," she said, mentally, "how

I could love him! He is my husband, I am his wife; bound together as one for all time. God only can sever the cord that binds us for weal or for woe. Perhaps his experience from long absence has taught him wisdom. Perhaps," — and Bertha sat still, with a little icy ripple skimming the surface of a warming sea of thought.

Ah, when Bertha had reached the "perhaps," in reasoning with herself of her unworthy husband, there was no longer security for her strength of will against future events.

"Perhaps he has reformed, for 'with God all things are possible,' and we shall live happily together," was what Bertha had left unsaid; for secret belief conflicted with thought and yearning wish, and hope could not give birth to words.

"I will wait and see," was the conclusion to her long train of thought awakened by Horace Stanhope's sudden advent in startled Williamsville, — "and let coming events cast the die for my destiny. I wonder if he expects me to return with him to New York. I will wait and see."

And she waited, but not long.

The quiet town of Williamsville was soon alive with the surprising story that "Yankee Stanhope, the handsome rascal, had opened a full store on Main Street, and was doing finely, — owned a splendid 'fast horse,' and sported a negro servant, and carried things with the air of a nabob."

Bertha smiled, quietly, but made no comments, as did her less considerate father; but she was equally as sceptical.

"I'll bet any amount he'll fail in less than five months," said fearful Mr. Belmont — fearful for the effect of Stanhope's proximity to his daughter, and unavoidable views of his handsome and seemingly repentant face. "Moreover, I'll wager he don't own one dollar of all that goes under his name; and, like as not, he'll get into jail for the 'fine

business' he's doing. I pity the fellow that trusted him—that's all! Well, if he'll steer clear of me and mine, he may go scot-free, so far as *I'm* concerned. I've had enough of him for one lifetime." And Mr. Belmont tossed a tobacco-quid behind the back log, and glanced slyly at Bertha to observe her expression.

"Pity but you had thought so from the beginning, pa."

"Yes, child; but I never was so deceived in a man in all my born days—*hang* me, if it ain't so!"

Mr. Belmont hitched in his easy-chair, nervously, and expectorated freely in the direction of the discarded quid.

"And now it is *too late* to repent," said Bertha, as she turned away.

"Hey?" interrogated the old man; but no reply came, for the speaker had passed out; and it was long before she sat there again.

"I'll be hanged if I like that!" said the doubting father to Mrs. Belmont,—"it has n't the right sound for safety! I question if the girl don't trust to the villain's promises and make-believe penitence, and run off with the rascal. And the next we know he'll switch her away to New York, and break her heart with jealous cruelty, or starve her to death with his poverty; for the fellow ain't worth shucks, nohow! Bertha is a good girl, but too easily led by kindness; and the mischief of it is, she can't discern the counterfeit from the current article. She ought to know, by this time, how little reliance is to be placed upon his honor. Well, she won't go with *my* consent—that's settled. I'm really fearful the scoundrel will commit some desperate act in secret, and claw out by attributing it to accident. I don't believe her life is safe in his hands—he's so infernally jealous!"

While Mr. Belmont's fears were thus finding vent in anxious words, Bertha was going with triumphant Horace

Stanhope to the "pleasant room" he had "prepared for her"!

Horace had smuggled touchingly beautiful penitent letters, brimful of fondest love and solemn promises and pious sentiments, into her hand, and thrown himself in her way on every possible occasion, with loving reproach in his sadly smiling blue eyes, and soft snatch-kisses upon her little white hand, until Bertha was subjugated by her husband's perseverance and tender pleading; and she said to her heart:

"I can but try. It is my duty to do all in my power to render him happy, now that I am his wife. I shall love him, if he will let me; I believe I love him now, he is so handsome and tender. He looks changed, — perhaps we shall do well. I will trust to him."

And so Bertha passed from her father's presence down the old garden to the back gate, where Horace Stanhope awaited her; and the exulting husband bore her off in triumph.

Bertha left her home secretly, to avoid the excitement of an open departure. She was so delicately constituted that mental stimulation racked her head with torturing pain. And hence, her past life with Horace Stanhope had robbed her of vivacity and bloom. She was now healthful and brilliantly beautiful, as in the days of his courtship; and Horace Stanhope's loving but depraved heart burned with restless desire to get possession of his bewitching lovely young wife. And so elated was he with his success in "stealing her away from the old codger" — as he subsequently expressed it — that full seven days passed peacefully away before the shadow of a cloud appeared in their domestic horizon; which was an unprecedented event in their connubial life; for not one week had passed, after their marriage, before Horace Stanhope humbly apologized for

some freak of his unfortunate disposition, that shook up the tears to the brown eyes of his beautiful young bride.

Bertha was beginning to feel that a change, radical and permanent, had been wrought in her husband during his long absence, and bright hope for the future shone in the zenith of her matrimonial sky, when a sudden storm-cloud swooped up from the low horizon, and obscured the golden beams. Then she said: "It is vain to hope!"

Our heroine had not returned to her home since the day she went out from it with victorious Horace Stanhope; but now, in answer to her mother's message, she was preparing for a visit, when her watchful lord entered the chamber.

"Where now, Bertha?"

"Down home, — ma has sent for me."

"*Home!* Is not *this* your home, Bertha?"

"You know what I mean, Horace. Ma is not well, and wishes to see me."

"And *I* wish you to decline the invitation. Which will you obey?"

"Mr. Stanhope!"

"*My wife*, which will you obey?"

Bertha sank upon the bedside, unable to sustain her frail form under the sudden shock. This was the heaviest blow she had yet received. To refuse a sick mother's request was more than her filial affection could endure with composure. She reflected a moment.

"Why do you wish me to decline?"

"You should not desire to visit those whom you know are your husband's bitterest enemies."

"And why are they not your friends?" — Bertha's spirit was rising.

"That is neither here nor there — they are *not* my friends."

"But they are *my* friends, Mr. Stanhope, and my *parents*. If they are not *yours*, it is no fault of *theirs* — you know that.

It will be unnatural for me to refuse a sick mother"—she grew pale at the thought.

"We shall never live in peace, Bertha, until you are away from them. We have been happy together since your intercourse has been suspended. If they would leave you alone with me, you would have no cause to complain of unkindness in your husband; for you know you are dearer to my heart than the life-blood that nourishes it."

His arms were around her now, and the old soothing softness was in his tone and heavenly-blue eyes.

There was a strong struggle in her soul, between filial love and wifely duty. It is true, they had lived quietly since she left her home; but Bertha had been shut out from the world since she returned to Horace Stanhope, and his green life had nothing to feed upon.

He had taken her to a little, dark, unwholesome room in his business establishment, from which she had not emerged since she left her father's roof, and guarded her with unremitting care; trusting to the honesty of a negro servant during his master's absence from the store.

They had lived peacefully, thus; but now that she was about to disappear from his watchful eyes a little while, and go out into the free air once more, the clouds gathered above her head. Horace Stanhope was jealous of his wife's love for her parents and brother! Bertha knew that, for he had, long ago, forbidden her to receive her father's good-night kiss! He said that "now she was a married woman she should forget such a childish custom." And Bertha had submitted to his arbitrary will, for the sweet sake of peace that never came; for there were no limits to his jealous requirements.

Bertha thought it all over, as she sat there, with his arms around her, her head upon his idolizing but torturing breast, and his hand smoothing back the brown curls from

her beautiful but sorrowful young face. She knew he loved her, and she knew, also, that his love was the Upas of her life! But she would yield, so long as yielding could insure peace, without conflicting with a higher law.

"Will you obey me, Bertha?" — he knew she would, without the query; for Bertha's face mirrored her soul as clearly as a glass the object before it. Horace Stanhope had learned to read that face as easily as a simple sentence in English — he knew how far to presume, and when to repent; but in his rage, when the serpent bit him with unusual severity, he often overstepped the bounds of prudence, and brought a heavy rain with him when he came back.

"It is very hard, but I will not go, unless —"

"Unless what, dear?"

"Unless *ma* should grow worse. If her indisposition increases, you will not object?"

"Oh, no danger of that. It's only a *ruse* to get you there! I'll bet my head the old woman is well enough!" and he went out, smiling and rejoicing over his victory.

She could not help it — the thought came without any volition of will — it was the first feeling of a like character that had troubled her since their reunion; — but Bertha thought, as she looked after his retiring form, he would have to bet something of more value, if he would tempt *her* to take it!

To hear her loving and loved mother, now sick and suffering from her absence, thus coolly and contemptuously spoken of, burned our spirited heroine, and she hastily repented of her promise to the unfeeling, exacting man.

"He merited no consideration — he was unworthy of respect," she said, impulsively; but remembering the words, "Wives, be obedient to your husbands; even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord," — she crushed down

the bitter waters, and tried to evoke a better spirit. But Bertha sat there, and thought of her dear mother's tender love and sickness, and her own unhappy situation, in being heaven-bound to yield obedience to a jealous tyrant, until her soul died within her; and she felt if God would take her out of the world she could go without a struggle.

It was a bitter moment — full of conflicting passions, disgust, and yearning to break the fetters that bound her in links of iron. Then *a face* rose up before her, and deepened her disgust and loathing and remorse — the same *face* her mournful eyes had seen when she looked beyond the low brown house with the long piazza back into the years, and stood in the spring sunshine of her fourteenth year. It was a living secret, buried deep in her silent heart. Her father had come between them then, and now it was wrong for the wife of Horace Stanhope to dwell in fancy upon that *face*, with its mild, spiritual eyes and intellectual brow, where truth and honor were legibly written by God's own fingers. It had passed away from the low brown house with the long piazza, but left a deathless memory in her youthful heart that none had ever suspected. She knew it had vainly tried to return, and then it was lost among the rolling years; and Bertha wondered if the mild spiritual eyes yet beamed, and the noble brow was caressed by fairy fingers, as it would have been by hers, if her shrinking soul had been stronger in the dear departed days!

It was the memory of *that face* that had shielded her heart in after-years, and covered her with confusion when Mr. Redmond spoke of love, — it was that living remembrance of what might have been, and what might yet be, that made her shrink from Horace Stanhope and plead for a release. She saw *that face* distinctly, and felt it would haunt her future years, when she wrote Edalia:

"I cannot divest myself of the indefinable feeling, that the life of 'Bertha the Beauty' will be a wreck!"

She strove to put the memory from her after her marriage, but it *would* be felt in hours of struggling such as she now endured; and the mild spiritual eyes looked through the years that were gone, with living reproach for her weakness in yielding to a lover's fondness and a father's will, against the secret convictions of her own heart and conscience.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HIDDEN HEART. — EDALIA IS AGONIZED.

DO you know, Walter, my boy, that Wilmer the Lecturer has purchased and taken possession of your grandfather's old homestead?

Walter Eldon's face became as colorless as the rose-bud that Edalia had playfully pinned to his coat-collar; he dropped his arms upon the table, and exclaimed:

"Is it possible?"

"Fact, boy. I've just done up the business to the satisfaction of all the parties concerned, and seen the new proprietor legally installed. And the marvel is, Wilmer paid down thirty thousand dollars in 'El Dorado' gold for the landed estate, accumulated, he informed me, by three years' delving in the mines of California. Great place that for Indians, reptiles, and Achan wedges — by Jupiter!"

Walter sat musing, with his eyes resting upon his fingers, that unconsciously beat a noiseless tattoo upon the table.

"Y-es, sir."

He roused up from his reverie, pushed back his chair, and continued, with a face of calm decision :

"A more propitious moment I could not avail myself of, sir, to apprise you of a design I have in contemplation. The steamer —— leaves New York for San Francisco at an early day, and it is my purpose to procure a passage to that western port."

Mr. Redmond started back aghast, and brought his fist down upon the table with a violence that astonished the crockery and glassware.

"*Con-fusion!* Go to that t'other-side-of-creation country, where the finest fun is twirling the tomahawk around your scalp, and the wolves snap at your hair under the miner's canvas! Nonsense, boy — nonsense! I say you shan't do it — by Jupiter!"

"But, sir —"

"No 'buts,' sir! Your sainted mother bequeathed you to my care and guidance, and I have endeavored to perform a faithful part by her orphan boy. There are no ties of consanguinity that render obligatory upon you any act of obedience to me. You are now free to will and to do as your inclination prompts; but with *my consent* you will never carry into effect this wild project. Have I failed in my duty to the dead and the living, boy, that you wish to desert me, now that the sun is almost set and the night is closing round?"

Walter's eyes moistened. He started up, and, leaning over the old man's chair, laid his arms upon his shoulders, and said, tremulously :

"No, sir; you have ever been to me a friend and a father. I can never repay your manifold kindnesses and munificence; but my deep sense of the gratitude I owe you is only equalled by that I feel. But —"

"But what, boy?" He drew Walter's arms over, and

crossed them upon his breast. "Speak out, sir; let's have an eclaircissement."

"But, as you say, sir, there are no ties of consanguinity to entitle me to further munificence; and now that you have laid the foundation, it behooves me to rear the structure by my own individual exertions."

"And ain't you doing it, sir? Why, how much work have you accomplished since the old judge licensed you to labor? I' faith, you'll have a famous structure in five years, boy."

"Five years!"

"Eh? you deprecate the *period*! Five years at your age is n't an eternity, boy. Why this impatience to be rich speedily?"

Walter's face crimsoned as he turned slowly away, and replied:

"That, sir, I must withhold even from *you*."

A vigorous knock at the door announced a visitor, and interrupted the discussion. They adjourned to the parlor. Di entered with the information that Mr. Simpkins desired a private interview with Mr. Eldon. Walter led the way to the office.

"What the deuce is on the docket now?" grumbled Mr. Redmond, as he paced the room with rapid strides.

"Girl, you're white as that curtain! You sympathize with my apprehensions. That Simpkins is a bird of ill omen. I feel a presentiment of evil. I've foreseen it for months—that Henley! Yes, yes, there's mischief before the court; but don't be scared, Ed,—hang me, if I don't blow this plot sky-high in a twinkling!"

He touched the bell, and dispatched John with a message to Walter.

"Boy," as the young man answered the summons, "you can now cancel every debt of gratitude that you think due

me, as your guardian from infancy, by one act of confidence. What is the purport of this secret transaction?"

"Sir, I have received a challenge from Colonel Henley."

"Just as I — monster!" breathed Mr. Redmond hoarsely through his clenched teeth.

An icy coldness crept over Edalia. She stole silently from the room, and ascended the stairs as swiftly as her nervous temperament would permit. She entered her chamber and secured the door.

Alone, a host of thoughts and feelings crowded around her; now curdling about her heart, then leaping wildly along the blue, throbbing channels of life.

She knew his proud, intrepid spirit; combined with the meekness and gentleness of a dove, he possessed firmness and fearlessness unsurpassed.

Would he meet Henley? She doubted it not! Who so young, and exquisitely sensitive on all points touching his fair fame, could by any act of moral courage brand it in a worldly sense with the term "coward"? Like the Apostle Paul, she "reasoned after the manner of men."

The blood rushed hotly to her brain. She sank dizzily upon the floor and pressed her burning brow upon the marble slab of her dressing-table.

As she knelt, the past, with all its various phases, moved slowly before her — a broad and varied panorama of life's changing scenes. The bright-eyed, buoyant boy, ever attentive to her lightest wish — her unappreciative soul — the sober, thoughtful youth, breathing farewell for years, with moist eyes and a half uttered thought upon his pale lips checked and frozen by her smiling coldness — the proud, firm-hearted man folding in his isolated heart a silent, secret sorrow! She traced step by step the melting of her frozen heart, slowly but effectually, till wholly liquefied and lost in the deep stream of his own life and love!

And now fancy pictured the battle-field ; the noble form extended upon the damp ground in the agonies of death !—dying, unconscious that two lives are ebbing away beneath the murderer's exulting eye !

Edalia sprang up and wandered around the room in unutterable anguish. She caught her reflection in the broad mirror, as she paced the chamber, and stopped in mute wonder and fascination.

The face was marble-white and rigid, and the blue veins lay in threads upon the temples, pulsing wildly and hotly. Mortal pallor surrounded the slightly parted lips ; dark, heavy circles encompassed the flashing black eyes ; and the long loose curls hung in midnight masses over the snowy robe and livid face, like a cloud of woe.

Tears would have been a relief—a luxury ;—but the fierce flame that surged through her heart and brain dried up the liquid fountain-waters ; and pressing her hand upon the scorched and thirsty lids, she leaned over the golden letters glittering upon the white shell, and another memory swept over her.

She had observed in Walter's chamber an elegant volume, well worn ; and on the fly-leaf was traced in delicate chi-rography :

“EVA ELDON.

A Mother's dying Gift to her darling boy.”

Beneath was written, in bold characters :

“ Word of the everliving God,
Will of His glorious Son,
Without thee, how could earth be trod,
Or Heaven itself be won.”

And the simple word “Mother” betrayed the author.
And as Edalia leaned, now in tearless agony, a pencilled

passage therein arose to her mental vision, and found a deep response in her wretched heart:

“Whither thou goest, I will go; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE “FACE” REPROACHES BERTHA. — GREEN-EYES DEFEATED. — CLAUDE BELMONT.

THE *face* looked up through the years sadly reproachful at Bertha, as she sat there on the bedside and thought how weak she had been in yielding to others in a matter that would affect her whole future life, for happiness or misery. She had grown firmer in heart since that fatal day — she had learned to suffer and be strong.

Bertha yearned to recall the words that bound her to Horace Stanhope for all time, or till death; yearned with a soul-longing that grew to keenest pain, as she realized her position to the fullest extent. How firm, how brave she could be now in refusing her father’s chosen — now that it was eighteen months *too late*!

She had thrown away her life; for what would the future be without love? She had thought to love him, through his own great love; but how could she love one whom she could not respect?

She had trusted to her father, blinded by prejudice and deceived by show, and he had led her into lifelong woe. She should have been braver and stood firm, in the conviction that marriage with Horace Stanhope would be a mockery in God’s sight; — stood firm in refusing to syllable with her

lips a vow that her whole heart could not utter. How willingly would she now risk his displeasure, and even be cast out from his home for disobedience, could she but be relieved of the great sin-burden and soul-pain of being an unloving, disgusted, hopeless wife!

Sitting there lamenting the great weakness that had wrecked her life; mourning for the suffering mother, whom she was forbidden to see by a tyrant to whose power fate had fastened her forever, the deep cry of her struggling spirit was: "When — oh, when will it end!"

Seriously, was it her *duty* to submit to such tyranny, and by yielding to injustice and heartless cruelty render wretched one whose love for her was deathless and pure?—she asked herself. Then the solemn words of the marriage ritual, "And forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as you both shall live," came over her troubled conscience. She had sealed her own doom in assenting to those words, and there was no escape now. The path of duty was plainly marked out before her, and though thorny and sunless, she must walk the cheerless way.

"I will try! — I will *try*! — and God help me!" was the great cry of that bruised and blighted youthful heart.

And she did.

Bertha took up the monotonous thread of her daily life, and the weary hours went on.

Horace Stanhope watched her truthful face, and chided her for every shade that settled in her brown eyes. Could she have been free from his scrutiny and constant reproaches for the effect produced by his own tyranny, life would have been less wearisome.

"Stanhope won't suffer his wife to visit her mother, and the consequences are unfavorable to her present state of health," said Dr. Burnell, as he walked the hotel piazza, with sober eyes.

"Stanhope is the greatest Yankee rascal that ever married a Southern wife," replied Major Watson, the proprietor of the hotel. "The Lord knows, he only merits a piece of hemp, well twisted, for a cravat!—that fact is pretty well known hereabouts. Anything worse in Mrs. Belmont's case, doctor?"

"Yes; I called in Dr. Whiteley this morning, and we consulted together. I won't take the responsibility of acting alone—the symptoms are bad; and unless her daughter is permitted to visit her, I won't answer for the result; mind and body are both disordered. I have advised Mrs. Stanhope, through her brother, of her mother's situation, and I hardly think she can be restrained by her villanous lord. But she's nothing but ware, in stronger hands, or she would not now be in that tyrant's power. If she were my sister, I'd break his head before he does her heart, by George!"

"Belmont threatens to shoot him, if he ever puts foot on his premises again; and the rascal could n't do his wife and the world a greater favor and service than by tempting the old man to perform his vow! I'm blest, if he ain't too mean to live, and the whole community knows it. From his appearance he might have been cut out for a gentleman, but he was mortally ugly made up! Why, sir, he has no more soul or shame than this pipe I'm smoking—fact!"

"We all know him pretty thoroughly by this time, I 'guess.' (Dr. Burnell was a native of New Jersey, and a little touched with Yankeeism in his language, but not in mechanism.) And how well she might have married, with her beauty and accomplishments! She was the sweetest-looking sick woman I ever had the privilege of attending, and I thought him the most devoted husband the world ever saw, for the fellow never left the bedside when I was about. I comprehend now some little circumstances that transpired during my attendance, that were passed by at the

time — the rascal was jealous of his wife's physician! I see it all now."

"I should like to know of whom the fool is n't jealous — that's all! It matters not if he's old or young, married or single — it's all one to the scoundrel, if he looks admiringly at Bertha. There's Harry Herbert — as honest a youth as ever said a prayer — says Bertha has n't spoken to him in twelve months, and —"

"Herbert like to have gone mad after her marriage, and I suppose Green-Eyes has learned the fact."

"Herbert seems to understand it now, but it hurt him at first. I only wish the man she's got was *half* as honorable as the one she did n't have — that's all! If a girl is to shun all her old beaux after her marriage, and hate everybody but her husband, I say she'd better take the veil in some convent, and die an old maid!"

"Hum!" said the doctor, as he turned on his heel and strode indignantly away.

Bertha had hoped to secure peace by yielding to her husband's requirements; but she found it was not to be obtained on such terms. Harry Herbert was an especial object of his jealousy, notwithstanding she had faithfully performed her promise with reference to him. Horace Stanhope was continually maligning his character, and commenting upon his daily deportment; for what purpose, she at length divined; his base soul could not be satisfied of her indifference, without proof in harsh words of one whom she could not but respect. Bertha's sense of honor and justice could not condescend to gratify him there, and sly insinuations respecting secret affection for him at length grew to open accusations. Bertha's curling lip beat him back from further encroachments. Profane words closed the scene, and Stanhope's heels rang along the floor, as he made a hasty exit to cool down his rising temper.

Bertha found that peace with Horace Stanhope was not to be obtained on any terms. She had passed coolly a kind and Christian friend, to disarm his jealousy; she had left her home, to gratify him; she had refused a sick mother's request to test the effect of entire separation from her family, to whom he attributed the cause of their unhappiness in the past; and yet their present life had become as restless and inharmonious as the past had been. She resolved to do her duty to all in the future, pursue a straightforward course as conscience might direct, and leave the consequences to Him, who, "for human weal, husbands all events."

"Ma is very ill, sis. Dr. Burnell says he won't answer for the consequences, if you don't come home immediately."

Claude Belmont was standing at Bertha's window, with deep concern upon his young face.

Bertha started to her feet, spasmodically.

"Is ma worse?"

"Yes; and I don't believe the doctor has much hope of her ever being better," — his lips shut tightly.

"Oh," Bertha wrung her small, child-like hands, "I thought she was improving — Horace told me so!"

"Horace is a lying knave!" thundered Claude, whitening with wrath at the sound of the name.

"Sh! sh!" said Bertha, glancing furtively at the door.

"I don't care a snap!" cried Claude, crossing his thumb and finger with a rousing report. "Satan's a saint, to him, and hell ain't hot enough to scorch the infernal scoundrel! If ma dies, I'll spill his base blood as certain as there's a bullet in the barrel. — *I will!*" emphasized the fiery youth.

"There, there! don't get into a passion; it won't mend matters a bit. Tell ma I'll come, 'though the heavens fall'!"

And Claude Belmont knew she would, as he observed her face.

"Horace?"

"Well, dear?"

"Ma is growing rapidly worse, and Dr. Burnell has sent to advise me to go down immediately!"

"Who came?"

"Bud."

"I thought so — ha, ha! Only a feint, Bertha. I've heard she's improving — has n't been very sick at all."

"Who told you?"

"Well — ah — several who came into the store. I inquired for your sake."

"They spoke without authority then. It is n't likely they should be as well informed on the subject as Dr. Burnell."

"Well, to satisfy you, I'll inquire of the doctor."

"I'm satisfied already on that point. I called you to say, I wish to go down. I cannot longer remain away, and you surely will not object?"

"But I *do* object — what then?"

"I would like to have your consent; but if not, I must go without it."

"You will?"

"It is my duty, as a child; and I should be less than human to refuse now. I am going."

"You are?"

"*I am.* Do you consent, Horace?"

"No, by ——! And when you get there — *stay!*"

"Very well, Mr. Stanhope — I will."

Horace Stanhope grew white as death, as she turned away. He felt he had tolled the bell for his own funeral, but he was too hard and hot to apologize then; and he trusted to his arts and wiles to win her back.

He watched her as she went down the thoroughfare, and saw her recognize Harry Herbert with a bow. Harry lifted his hat gracefully, and held it respectfully above his head,

as he looked after her, too, with a mingling of sadness and pity in his soft blue eyes.

Horace Stanhope writhed with animosity, and ground his teeth with jealous rage.

Harry Herbert looked up at him, and saw the demon working in his face. Stanhope saw him smile as he turned away, and thought:

"The scoundrel is exulting in his triumph!"

He subsequently repeated it to Bertha. She said, in reply to his accusation of falsehood:

"I promised you, Horace, on condition that it would disarm your jealousy; but it has not. I have determined to do my duty, and satisfy my conscience in the future, let the consequences be what they may. I have done violence to it many times for your sake, and it wins no reward from you of peace and confidence."

"Oh, if that's your game, your first duty is to obey me."

"So far as your requirements are just and right — and I have done it; and more. But I will not do violence to my conscience again, even for the sake of momentary quiet."

Bertha found her mother very low, notwithstanding Stanhope's daily information that she was "better," "improving," "getting well," and so on. She reproached herself for her credulity, and having remained so long away, when she looked upon that poor, thin face. But the mother knew the child was guiltless of wrong, and uttered no word of complaint.

Mrs. Belmont grew calm and cheerful, with her daughter by her bed-side, until the shades of evening came on; then a restlessness was visible in her dark eyes. Bertha had not informed her home-circle of Horace Stanhope's parting words, knowing he would repent and come for her, and the past be exposed. She would conceal his meanness, so long as concealment were possible.

Mrs. Belmont watched her daughter as night came down.

"He won't let you come again, Bertha?"

"He must promise to offer no opposition in future, or I will not return to him, ma."

The mother laughed softly, with tears standing in her sunken eyes.

"Hurra for you!" shouted Claude, skipping up from his chair, and turning on his heel like a top, "that's the way to put your foot down! Screw him hard, and he'll cave like a clay-bank in a long spell o' weather! You did n't begin right in the first place, sir; you ought to have shown fight before your white shoes were off—such fellows need it to keep 'em straight! Stanhope's as arrant a coward as ever wore calf, and, like all of his kind, he will impose upon the weak and helpless; while the strong and brave can push him to the wall without much of an effort. I don't approve of petticoat government, as a general thing, but I'll be shot with a shovel if it ain't necessary with fellows like Stanhope! The more you kick a dog the better he'll like you; and the harder you flatten some people's nose, the easier you'll get on with 'em—dog me!"

"Try to do your duty as a wife, and don't neglect your duty as a child, my daughter," said Mr. Belmont; "never run to extremes from a false sense of right, but take the intermediate path, and walk it firmly. Let reason dictate, and conscience obey."

"I'm going to do that in future, pa." He thought she was, when he looked at her.

Mr. Belmont smiled strangely. He said to his wife, when Bertha was gone:

"That child has grown wonderfully strong and self-conscious, of late. That small mouth shuts like a vice, when she means a thing; and her face looks like flint sometimes. I'm glad of it," he added, as he knocked the ashes

from his pipe, and blew through the stem to clear the tube before laying it by. "Stanhope won't be able to impose upon her so easily now. I 'guess' she'll stick up for her rights. If she'd been as independent two years ago, she would n't be a villain's wife now!"

This was the first hint that Mr. Belmont had ever breathed, respecting his influence in Bertha's unfortunate marriage.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. REDMOND "DIVES TO THE BOTTOM." — THE SECRET STORY REVEALED.

EDALIA!"

Walter's voice was quick and solicitous. She lifted her head from her hands and answered the call. He started back with a cry of terror, as she threw open the chamber-door.

"Great God! — Edalia!"

He caught her nervously in his arms, gathered her closely up to his frightened breast, and dropped his white face upon her deathlike brow.

"Darling, there is no cause for distress; I have declined —"

Edalia heard no more. Her senses receded, and she lay insensible upon his breast.

A confused noise of frightened sobs and flying servants greeted her as she awoke to consciousness. She was in the parlor, supported by Mr. Redmond and Walter, mutually.

"Lor' bless de chile!" said Aunt Cora, as she rubbed the cold white hands and held a burnt feather to her nose. "She never had a fit 'fore 'n 'er life, po' thing! Aunt Cory *knows* she did n't!"

Mr. Redmond started up, relieved, as Edalia opened her eyes.

"Why, Ed, Lord bless my soul and body, if you haven't scared me out 'n a year's growth! I feel two inches shorter, by Jupiter!"

He straightened himself up to a height that showed his feelings decidedly at fault with his appearance.

Edalia felt the wild throbbings of the heart to which she was closely held, and lifted her eyes to his. They were bent upon her face, and suffused with tears.

"And you will not meet?"

"No, Edie; human life is of more value than to be lightly perilled, and that, too, by a false sense of *honor*. I fear not man, but regard Him who has said, 'Thou shalt not kill,' and 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price;' and He alone must be the arbiter of my existence."

"Good, boy! That's logic that can't be gainsaid. The veriest dastard will fight to the death, through physical insensibility, to prove himself what he isn't; but it requires a vast amount of courage to turn from the gage thrown down by a burly antagonist, from principles of morality."

"Colonel Henley, sir, was perfectly well aware of my sentiments with regard to duelling, and, consequently, I felt the less hesitation, even in a social sense, in declining his challenge."

"Precisely; and he the less reluctance in sending it, beyond question. He burnishes his bravery without the help of a bullet through his gown. But tell us, boy, the provocation that conduced to such a result."

Walter colored and hesitated, but at length replied:

"Colonel Henley, sir, imputed to me, publicly, designs of a mercenary nature upon the hand of a young lady, to which I retorted with unjustifiable warmth, unless the high esteem in which I hold her, apart from all considerations of a

pecuniary character, can be considered a sufficient extenuation."

"By Jupiter, a woman's at the bottom of all mischief!" ejaculated Mr. Redmond, his eyes sparkling with pleasure. "And so Henley's jealous, eh?"

"It is a groundless jealousy, then, sir, for I have never presumed upon her hand."

"But you love her, boy?"

Walter was silent.

"I say?"

"Differently circumstanced, I would answer you, sir."

"Differently circumstanced!" The old gentleman's eyes flashed. "Does the girl reciprocate your feelings?"

"I have never questioned her on that point, sir."

"Boy, a lover's eye is not easily deceived. Does the girl love you?"

"Judging from appearances — yes, sir."

"Then you fear opposition from her parents?"

"No — yes — sir, let us waive the subject."

"Shan't do it. I'm bound to dive to the bottom of this business, by Jove!" He walked the room in a heat of excitement. "If your love is mutual, why do you scruple to propose, sir?"

"Because, sir, I shall never lay myself liable to the charge of cupidity by aspiring to the hand of one so far my superior in wealth. You know now, sir, why I 'desire to be rich speedily'; and with this knowledge you will offer no further opposition to my design."

"I say I shall, though; hang your pride!"

"It is not so much pride as the peculiar circumstances by which I am surrounded."

"Peculiar circumstances!" The old gentleman's eyes snapped. "What's the girl worth?"

"A thousand worlds."

"All gammon! In dollars and cents, I mean. Deuce take your rhapsodies!" He perambulated and mused. "Boy, you are the possessor of fifty thousand dollars. Will that equalize you, in a pecuniary point of view?"

"Sir!"

"I say you are the possessor of fifty thousand dollars."

"How, sir? I thought—"

"Am I addicted to speaking unadvisedly?"

"No, sir."

"Then, boy, go and enjoy all that I have ever hoped for your mother's son." His voice faltered.

Walter turned his bright eyes upon Edalia with a joyous smile. His face glowed with happiness. He walked firmly up and extended his hand.

"Edie, I have loved you from boyhood—you know how fervently. Will you be *my* Edie—*my* wife?"

"*I will*, Walter."

He folded her closely in his arms with a trembling clasp, and laid his flushed face upon her half-hidden forehead.

Mr. Redmond took them both in his arms, with tears trickling down his cheeks.

"God bless you, children! You have now realized the cherished hopes of years. Boy, this is the happiest moment I have known since I held your angel mother as you do my niece!"

"My mother, sir?"

"Your mother, boy. Behold her, and gratify an oft expressed desire."

He drew from his bosom a small, golden locket, and touching a spring, revealed the delicate form of a fair young girl, in the first flush of womanhood, bearing a striking resemblance to him whose arm encircled Edalia.

A robe of azure-blue draped the slender form; the plump white arms were bare, and a veil of silky ringlets fell

lightly over the round, fair face and graceful shoulders like a soft cloud of golden-hued mist. The large blue eyes smiled upon the beholder from under the dark, curved fringe, and a faint expression of innocent mirth sat upon the small, rosy mouth.

Walter gazed reverently upon the lovely semblance, and gently murmured :

"Mother."

It was the language of the heart.

The old man paced the floor with an abstracted air.

"Children, the world laughs at the lone old bachelor, and deems him devoid of feeling—destitute of the softer sensibilities that are apparent in others of his sex ; but far down in the still cloister of the old man's soul lies a folded leaf, lettered over with Love's Young Dream, defying the mildew of time, and living fresh and warm through all the vicissitudes of rolling years. Let the world say what it will, 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and

'The wealth of the ocean lies fathoms below
The surface that sparkles above!'"

He placed the miniature in his bosom with a tremulous hand, and with a fervent benediction left the newly betrothed alone.

"You may read the letter now, Ed," said Mr. Redmond, as she kissed him good-night and went up to her chamber.

Di was soon wandering in dreamland. She opened the little case, and drew forth the hidden treasure. Breaking the seal, a delicate missive dropped from the envelope superscribed by her uncle. Edalia read :

"MAPLE HALL, June 20, 18—.

"I am dying, Edward,—slowly, but surely ; dying in the morning of life, alone and broken-hearted. I go gladly,

fearlessly ; for all that rendered life lovely is lost to me forever, and I long to flee away and be at rest !

“ But I cannot go down to the dim valley, conscious that he, whom I have so loved, deems me false and unworthy of the love he gave ! No, Edward, though I lie in the dusk of the grave, asleep from the anguish of earth, when you learn the weight of woe that is wasting my life away, I cannot die and let this fatal secret lie buried with me !

“ Should you ever return from your lone wanderings over the wide waters — exiled by my seeming inconstancy — go to the silent spot where the hand that indites and the heart that dictates lie cold and throbless ; and know, if immutable love, that yielded only to the icy hand of death, to rise exultant and eternal in the spirit-land, could render her deserving, the pale sleeper beneath is worthy of the tears you shed.

“ Ah, that dim, hushed eve, when we stood beneath the old maple and watched the mellow moonlight starring the still waters, dreaming that life to us could not be less bright and sparkling than its silvery surface ! You remember, Edward, that happy hour ? It was the last that I have ever known !

“ I parted with you that eve, with the sweet story of your whispered love lying, like a blessing, in the sunny fane of my youthful heart. That eve ! — it was the last flicker of Hope’s taper — the last note of the dying swan, the brightest, the sweetest — *the last !*

“ I was told that I must resign you, or be considered the murderer of my father ! He produced the instrument of death, and presented it to his heart ! I yielded, and became the wife of Mr. Eldon. Though conscious of my absorbing love for another, he made me a perjurer at the holy altar ! I have endeavored to perform the duties of a wife ; but my soul was wedded to you, Edward, that blue, starry night ; and the vow I uttered was recorded by angel hands upon the scroll of immortality.

“ My father sleeps now beneath the old willow, where they laid my loved mother long years ago ; and my husband is — I cannot write it !

“ My sweet babe — my little Walter Edward — will soon be motherless. Should he ever be fatherless, oh, Edward,

by the memory of our young and happy years, guard his infancy, guide his youth, and counsel his manhood.

"To your sister, my dear Edalia, I intrust this plea for my lovely babe. I could die tranquil, could I place him in your arms, and know you will cherish my little, lone bud — for his father is cold and indifferent !

"And now, Edward, *dear* Edward, farewell. I have loved thee on Earth ; meet me in Heaven.

"In spirit, your

EVA."

And this was the history of the young sleeper in the silent church-yard — the secret story of the old man's unwedded life.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HORACE STANHOPE RISKS HIS LIBERTY TO TEST HIS POWER.—ENVY REJOICES AT CALAMITY.

BERTHA !"

She turned at the sound. Horace Stanhope stood at the gate, looking up at the window, with one of his sunniest smiles.

"Come, dear ; it is growing late."

Bertha left the window, with a queer compression of the small mouth, and went down to the "repentant sinner." A shade of concern displaced the sunny smile, as she approached him, without preparation for gratifying his wish.

"You commanded me to '*stay*' when I came home." The face was very sober, but something in the eyes cheered him.

"Pooh ! You know I did n't mean it. I can't live without you, you witch ! Run for your bonnet — quick !"

"We must have an understanding before I go, Horace. Will you object to my coming again?"

Stanhope looked puzzled and vexed. He knew he was at her mercy, and dared not refuse then. In the height of passion he had informed her the law would sustain him in prohibiting her return home; but Horace Stanhope was well aware of the fact that such a proceeding would very speedily subject him to "lynch law" in that community. He had received hints to that effect in the past. Bertha's pity was his protection.

"I will not object, when it is advisable," he said, stingily.

"That won't do, Mr. Stanhope. I must have the privilege, without reproof, of coming home at any time. I have a child's and a sister's heart, and I will not consent to torture it, and punish those who love me simply for your revenge, in the future. It were far better to live apart, in peace, than together, in confusion and misery. Now that I am at home, I will '*stay*,' unless you promise to offer no further opposition."

She looked very beautiful and sweetly innocent, with her earnest face and rich brown, soul-full eyes, reproving his tyrannical spirit, as her little golden-brown head bent toward him over the low gate.

Horace Stanhope's impulsiveness got the better of his spite for a moment. He stooped quickly and kissed the small, red mouth.

"There, I promise, you torment! Now run for your bonnet."

It was such little flashes of golden light, revealing a better nature, that kept the night of hopelessness from closing around our heroine. While there was a spot of blue and a sunbeam in her horizon, she could not wholly freeze toward him. Horace Stanhope knew his power, and the material it was exerted upon.

"I'll come to-morrow, ma," she said, as she turned from the bedside of Mrs. Belmont.

"She'll do it, sure 's you're born," laughed the old man, as Bertha's footsteps died upon the stairs. "She looks hard as the rock of Gibraltar, by George!"

"She's had enough to harden her, poor child!" returned the mother, with a sigh.

"I'd like to hear the rascal fume when he gets her caged again!" growled Claude, clenching his hand; "and I'd like a dog sight better to bring my fist chuck against his green eyes—so!" and the mantel rang beneath the blow aimed at it by the indignant brother.

"Hello, bub!" sniggered Mr. Belmont; "don't spoil the paint and varnish, but never mind your fist, my boy."

Horace Stanhope drew his wife down upon his knee when she was safely shut in with him from the world again, and question after question was propounded, until all that had transpired in her absence was rehearsed in his jealous ear, with insinuations relative to the suppression of the most important items, at the close, on the part of the eager, invidious listener. The accusation of untruthfulness was then boldly hurled in her sober face, respecting her promise with reference to Harry Herbert.

Bertha's reply has been recorded, and Horace Stanhope felt the force of it and knew he must surrender at discretion. His tyrannical soul writhed with a feeling sense of his powerlessness to coerce her from further performance of filial duty, and his base and blind spirit resorted to a fatal expedient.

Without apparent design of personal violence, he displayed a weapon on an occasion of renewed jealousy, hoping to intimidate, without menaces, and subject her to his will through fear. Horace Stanhope was so cowardly himself,

he fancied he could swerve her from the right by secret apprehensions of sudden death.

Bertha looked steadily in his wrathful eyes, and it produced the effect that an unflinching gaze would upon a maniac. He subsided quietly, and appropriated the weapon to a purpose obviously his original design, but he retained the instrument in his chamber.

Our heroine was physically weak, though morally strong, and she averted her face to conceal its expression when her momentary firmness had passed. Horace Stanhope never knew the effect of his dastardly experiment, but he felt the consequences.

Bertha went home when morning dawned, and she never returned to that chamber again. Without either love or respect, and now impressed with the secret belief of an imperilled existence, she could no longer dwell beneath the same roof with Horace Stanhope.

He went for her when "night dropped her sable curtain down and pinned it with a star," but a servant was the only answer to his call. Horace Stanhope returned to his lonely room—made lonely by his own wicked and unmanly spirit—hot with wrath and white with mortal fear. He felt he had sealed his fate, and deeply imprecated his purblind folly. His pillow was soaked with tears when morning dawned, for Horace Stanhope was miserable without his patient, oppressed wife, and proved his faith in her fidelity by yearning eagerness to regain her when she had slipped from his grasp through his own treachery and unendurable tyranny.

Bertha declined to answer his repeated calls and returned his letters unopened, and Horace Stanhope soon fled from Williamsville, before the fear of being imprisoned.

The sequel showed he had been doing business "on trust" for the firm of "Cooley & Co.," through the influence of his

city brothers; and the goods sold under his own name were "tied up" from other creditors. He had become involved upon his own responsibility in Williamsville, and after Bertha's desertion his creditors would have pounced upon him, had he not "beat a hasty retreat."

Bertha was once more left to quiet repose, believing she would not be disturbed again by his return under the circumstance.

But ere the summer was ended, Horace Stanhope was again in Williamsville, and a prisoner for debt! He had risked his liberty to test his power with the hope of melting her heart to sympathy for his unfortunate fate.

Bertha was vanquished by this event. She received his letters, and comforted him with a reply. She was not strong enough to resist the supplications of one in his situation.

Horace Stanhope lingered in Williamsville after his term of imprisonment had expired. He solemnly vowed he would not depart, until she had granted him *one* interview.

"It can do no harm," she said to her mother, and, to hasten his departure, Mrs. Belmont assented.

The consequence was, our heroine went out from the home-roof one day, and was drawn by Horace Stanhope, half resisting and wholly in tears, through the little yard-gate — and Bertha never stood beneath that old, loved roof again!

Horace Stanhope had never looked so handsome, and tenderly repentant, as when he exerted all his powers to accomplish the purpose for which he had returned.

"I will die at your feet before I will leave you, Bertha," he said, piteously, "for life will be valueless without you. I have suffered enough for the past to be wiser and better in future. Go with me to my home, and, so help me God, you shall never repent your confidence!"

"Oh, I can not, *can not!*" she cried, in agony. "If we cannot live peaceably here, I have no hope of happiness away. You will forget your promise in the future, Horace, as you have done in the past, and I shall be friendless in a strange land."

"Dear, try me and see! You have relations in New York, and my brothers long to welcome you to their homes. Trust me once more, Bertha, and if you are not content, I will return you to your home, and never trouble you again — so help me God!"

"I will trust you again *here*, Horace," she sobbed; "but, oh, I can *not* go so far away — it would kill my poor mother! You promised her you would never take me from my home!"

"Dear, I could not foresee what would occur to render it necessary. I would remain now for your sake, if there were any prospect of success in business; but all are my enemies, because I have triumphed over them in winning you (he could resort to flattery now!) They wish to drive me away, and divorce you — I have heard it!"

"I shall never be divorced — I scorn the thought!" she said, indignantly. "And besides, if I desired it, it could not be obtained. Our State laws are not so liberal as some."

"It could be obtained in a few years, if I remain away, Bertha."

"If I am ever divorced, it will be by your act, Horace, — rest assured of that. And even were I free now by law of man, I should never marry again while you live — a higher law forbids it."

Horace Stanhope's eyes sparkled with exultation a moment; then he thought she might be induced, by future arguments, to compromise with her conscience. He renewed his humble entreaties and solemn penitential promises, and

so wrought upon her weakness and sympathy that, in a moment of forgetfulness of all the past, he drew her through the little yard-gate; and when Mr. Belmont and Claude returned to their home, the old house was desolate and dripping with tears.

"Poor, deluded child!" said Mr. Bagby, a warm friend of the family. "A rope of sand is stronger than Stanhope's honor."


"She's weak as dish-water — let her take the consequences!" exclaimed Dr. Watson, a young bachelor and old-time admirer of our heroine — now highly indignant and snappish.

"She married him; let her stick to 'im through thick and thin!" growled Mr. Smithson, an old gray-headed bachelor. "Them's my sentiments!" he snarled, with half angry eyes.

"I'm glad she's gone!" whispered blue-eyed Miss Evelyn to her confidante, who subsequently betrayed her. "Now there'll be some chance for the rest of us! She was in the way before her marriage with that good-for-nothing Yankee; and I've heard some rumor of a divorce."

And so it ran. The quiet town of Williamsville was all alive with the startling news of our heroine's departure for New York "with that Yankee rascal Stanhope"; and "Bertha the Beauty" was almost universally censured for her "foolish faith."

Harry Herbert listened quietly, with white face and firmly set lips, to the remarks of the indignant citizens, but made no comment. Then he went down to Mr. Belmont's, and condoled with the bereaved family.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

HORACE STANHOPE'S ANTECEDENTS. — ALONZO'S
OPINION OF BERTHA.

HANNAH STANHOPE sat in a vine-covered portico, in the beautiful town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, with the red rays of an August sunset kissing the cheek of departing day to a deeper blush.

Hannah was musing and evidently watching for some one through the flowering vines. She was not handsome, but had an amiable, inviting face. Her kind heart kindled in her mild eyes at every breath that touched her sensitive ear. She was not handsome now, but might have been, in early womanhood; but the freshness and bloom of youth were gone from her mature and chastened face.

She had buried three children in little green graves, and was alone now, and as she sat, in that rosy August eve, her sober blue eyes peered through the vine-leaves to catch a glimpse of the coming husband and father from the sultry city of Gotham.

Hannah's history was romantic. In early youth she had loved Alonzo Stanhope, but her father refused to receive him as a son-in-law. Hannah was an obedient child, and declined to marry, without her father's sanction, until she attained her majority.

Alonzo Stanhope left her, angered by her firm adhesion to principle, and emigrated to Tennessee. He there married a Southern wife and became the father of three children. Hannah heard of his inconstancy, and it wrung her faithful heart; but she lived on, through long years of single blessedness, with a fair prospect, considering her many rejected suitors, of dying an old maid.

Alonzo Stanhope buried his wife and children in Tennessee when Hannah Goodrich had attained the age of twenty-seven, and returned to his early home, a childless widower. He renewed his suit to faithful Hannah, and, despite her father's still existing opposition, they were married.

Mr. Goodrich finally became reconciled to his daughter's marriage with Alonzo Stanhope;—he proved to be more worthy of Hannah's affection than her father had anticipated.

Mr. Stanhope, senior, was a wealthy citizen of Lenox, Massachusetts, when his children—eight sons and two daughters—were born; but disobeying the commandment "Be not thou one of them that are sureties for debt," he was reduced, by a friend's failure in business affairs, from affluence to comparative poverty.

Hence his children were indifferently educated, and, as they grew up, settled down to a clod-hopping life, with no ambition beyond milch-cows and market-butter.

Alonzo, Allyn, and Horace were the exceptions. They broke away from the "farms," and escaped to the great iniquitous city of Gotham, and acquired the polish that contact with refined society affords.

Alonzo and Allyn were sober, self-sacrificing, and persevering men, and, consequently, successful adventurers upon the capricious sea of fortune; but Horace's natural indolence, self-indulgence, and restless temperament kept him continually under the wheel. He had no strength of character, and drifted lazily down the stream to dependence and contempt, without an effort to beat against the waves and secure confidence and respect. He had no moral strength, that renders one worthy the esteem of his fellows, but in the pursuit of that which would gratify his sensual nature his perseverance was surprising—he had no superior. His sole dependence for the future was upon his handsome face and

graceful form. He soon wearied of the monotony and labor of displaying dry-goods to fastidious customers. He would go South and marry a girl with five hundred negroes and boundless acres.

Horace Stanhope's purse became depleted, through his prodigal propensities, before he crossed the line of Mason and Dixon. He was an elegant penman, and his wits soon replenished his purse. He gave lessons to a select few in the fine art of chirography, plainly intimating it was from a spirit of romance, and not from necessity. His charge for the great condescension was aristocratic. He succeeded admirably.

Bertha Belmont's evil genius led Horace Stanhope to Williamsville the same week of her father's return to her native town. She met him, the first Sabbath after her arrival, in an evening walk. His sensual soul was fired by her rare beauty and native innocence. He watched her to her home, and the following day he succeeded in obtaining an introduction into it, with a proposition to Mr. Belmont to receive his daughter as an "honorary member" of the select class he was forming; to which Mr. Belmont assented, and entered Claude as a paying pupil through partiality for his own people.

Thus commenced an acquaintance that eventually proved fatal to the peace of all parties.

Horace Stanhope's design in securing "Bertha the Beauty" as an "honorary member" very speedily became manifest. His devotion to her became the town-talk. The belles envied her, and the beaux him. They were a well-matched pair, for beauty and grace. Mr. Belmont favored his suit, and threw impediments in the way of other admirers. Claude was wholly won by the charming and artful lover, and reproved his sister for her lack of appreciation. In an evil hour Bertha yielded, and sealed her fate!

In marrying Bertha, Horace Stanhope had fallen very far short of "five hundred negroes and boundless acres," but pride and passion must be gratified at any cost. It was well worth a sacrifice to triumph over so many competitors for the beautiful prize, and then, his heart was involved. Horace Stanhope acknowledged he had never loved till now.

Besides, Mr. Belmont was in easy circumstances, and even in a pecuniary point of view it would n't be a bad bargain. He very readily promised never to take Bertha from her home, for then he would not be necessitated to exert himself for her support. He was nothing loth to be relieved of that responsibility.

Horace Stanhope was content to remain in idleness under his father-in-law's roof, until he was established in business upon capital advanced by the disappointed old man, who finally cast him out in disgust, as a dishonest, green-eyed, graceless adventurer.

Hannah Stanhope's blue eyes brightened, as she peered through the vine-leaves. He was coming; she distinguished his familiar form through the deepening dusk.

She went soberly forward, and met his extended hand. There were no manifestations of deep feeling in that quiet greeting; and yet she loved him far more than he was capable of feeling affection. Hannah knew that, yet she never betrayed it in words or seeming.

They sat down in the fragrant portico.

"Horace has come," he said, soberly.

"And his wife?"

"Yes — at last!"

"Is she as beautiful as she has been represented?"

"Even more! There is a soul-loveliness that no artist can paint. Bertha possesses it; and you must *see* her, to comprehend all her charms. A lovelier woman never met

a luckless fate! Horace borrowed money of a stranger on his way up to defray their expenses to New York, and called on me for the amount to repay the debt! I declined the honor, and he's dodging around in the city to avoid his creditor. He grows worse daily."

"My dear! Should n't have thought a stranger would lend."

"He's from Washington, North Carolina, on a summer visit to Saratoga and the Lakes; and I've no doubt, pity for Bertha induced the loan. His sister is with him, and the two girls (for Bertha is a mere child in appearance) formed quite a friendship during the journey. They all stopped at Old Point a week — Horace flourishing on borrowed funds, and Bertha ignorant of the fact. She knows it now though, and the knowledge hurts her."

"What on earth will become of that fellow, 'Lonzo?'"

"Lord knows! He's now at a private boarding-house on Greenwich Street, without any prospect of being able to pay. He's coming up to Berkshire next week, to sponge on his relations, if he can manage to slip off from his landlady!"

"Dear, dear, what a worthless man!"

"He's no man — he's a twenty-five year old boy; and a dreadfully dishonest one at that!"

"I wonder his wife followed him!"

"I do. He says he 'stole her away from the old codger.' Cooley says, you know, the Belmonts hate him like poison; and I don't believe Bertha loves him, from the look she gave him when the borrowed money business was exposed. I don't understand it — it passes my powers of comprehension. I pity the girl."

"Why on earth don't he go to work, and earn a living?"

"That's it! He makes money enough when he tries, but it's sooner gone than made; and where it goes to, the deuce

only knows! He ought to have had enough to carry him to Carolina and back with his wife, with the salary Allyn paid him before he left. And now the dog won't work. There's no vacancy in Allyn's store now, and last week I got him into a grocery establishment; but the fellow threw it up in a day. I guess, *I'll* have to support him, when we return to the city — so long as that poor child remains with him. I won't see her suffer — that's flat!"

"I guess she won't stay long, if she's honorable."

"I guess you'd think she *was* honorable, if you'd seen her indignant, scornful face (I can't call it by any other name!) when that borrowed money business came to light. I thought the blood would come through her cheeks, and her eyes flashed like lightning — and *such* a curl of that little red mouth! I should have been extinguished, if I'd stood in his shoes; but Horace coolly excused himself, by saying 'it was for her sake.' The fellow has a surprisingly hard cheek!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WEDDING-CAKE. — "MARS WALLIE'S GOOD LUCK."

LOR' bless yer heart, honey! I never seed sich a nice cake 'fore. I named it Mars Wallie, an' it's riz an' sponged up just as good as kin be! Dat shows 'is dispersition. I ollers knowed it, honey; for 'e's pine blank like 'is ma, in an' out — bless his blue eyes!

"An' you's gwine ter have 'im at las,' honey — he, he! I knowed when de snail rit in de plate, 't was boun' ter be; kase snails never failed yit — bless 'em! I gwine ter eat *some* cake ter-morrer night — 'deed I is so! Lor' bless yer

heart, chile, dare ain't a gladder nigger dis side o' heaben dan ole Aunt Cory, dis minnet! Jes' tack dem turkey wings 'tween my shoul'ers, honey, an' I'll fly 'way home! — An' Miss Bert's comin', too, honey; dat's —

"No, aunty; Bertha will not come."

"Wha — wa — what fur, chile?"

"Bertha is gone! — gone to New York with that Stanhope!"

"Lordy, massy, honey! You don' se' so, chile!"

"Peter is just up from Williamsville, and brings the sad news. She left two weeks ago, and that is why I failed to receive her expected letter. Mr. Belmont's family is nearly deranged, and the whole town is in a ferment."

"Massy on us, chile! What made 'er done go fur?"

"Stanhope half stole, half forced her away. Mr. Belmont and Claude were absent, or the mean Yankee jail-bird would not have ventured near her home."

"Good maister, honey! why did n't da take 'er 'way frum 'im?"

"The law forbade, when she was in his power. Claude — poor boy! — returned before they had left town. He watched his opportunity, and *would* speak to Bertha before she was taken away. They say it almost broke her heart. She screamed and clung to him, and would, no doubt, have run away home; but Stanhope held her firmly around the waist with both arms — the wretch! He forced her away from Claude, and lifted her into the carriage, half wild with grief."

"Po' thing! po' thing! I'll never see 'er no more now, honey, fur *shore*!" groaned Aunt Cora, over the wedding-cake, as she drew her check apron hastily over her eyes. "Dat's what da got fur makin' 'er have 'im!" she growled, presently. "Good 'nuff fur 'em, ef 't were n't fur her — po' thing!"

"Yes, aunty; they repent in sackcloth and ashes—now that it is too late. If parents would leave their children to make their own choice of a life-partner, there'd be fewer unhappy marriages. Old people are not proper persons to select for the young—just as though a young heart could be moulded by old hands! I don't pity *him*,—he richly merits what he's got, and so thinks the community in which he lives; but Mrs. Belmont is an object of sympathy. It is thought she will lose her mind."

"My lord, chile! dat's worse'n all — po' thing! po' thing!"

Edalia left the old woman groaning over the tray, the delight, in anticipation of the convivialities of "ter-morrer night," all gone from her sympathizing heart, and entered the "great house."

A knock at the door summoned Di, and Mr. Wilmer was announced. At his request, Edalia called her uncle and Walter from the office.

Mr. Redmond welcomed the visitor cordially, but Edalia observed the peculiar expression that invariably marked his features in the presence of Mr. Wilmer.

"I have learned," commenced Mr. Wilmer, "that a union of the Redmond and Eldon races is on the eve of consummation, and though it may seem impertinent, under circumstances as they now appear to exist, to you, yet I desire to ask, have I been correctly informed?"

"You have, sir," returned Mr. Redmond, with pale lips and agitated tone.

Mr. Wilmer sprang up and advanced toward the old man.

"And will you bestow your wealth and the hand of your niece on the penniless son of him who has wronged you beyond reparation, and the grandson of him who has rendered your life lonely and unblest by the nearest and dear-

est of earthly ties through avarice and unparalleled parental stoicism?"

"I have, sir."

Walter sprang up.

"Penniless! You have hitherto evaded my inquiries relative to this subject, sir, but I thought —"

"Boy," interrupted Mr. Redmond, "you are my *adopted son*."

Walter dropped down beside Edalia with a troubled air.

Mr. Wilmer turned and confronted the young man.

"What did you think? It may be to your advantage to answer me freely."

"That I was *not* a penniless aspirer to this hand, sir; that, notwithstanding all his unmerited care and kindness from infancy to mature years, I was asking *all* he has to bestow!"

"You are *not* a penniless aspirer to that hand, sir. You are the son of a wealthy and repentant man. Boy, I am Wilmer Eldon — *your father!*"

He threw off the dark tresses that hid his gray locks as he spoke.

Mr. Redmond shrank back and covered his face with his hands, and Walter sprang to his father's embrace. The old man bowed his head upon his boy's shoulder, and, like repentant Peter, he "wept bitterly."

Mr. Eldon advanced towards Mr. Redmond.

"Edward, it is written, 'If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' I can never repair the wrong I have done you, but will you forgive that wrong?"

Mr. Redmond grasped his extended hand, and the old pleasantry returned to his moist eyes and placid mouth.

They gathered around the long-lost, to hear the story of years that were gone. It ran:

"I left the scene of my ruin and wretchedness, a reckless

and hopeless man. God only knows how fondly I loved her, to obtain whom I compromised my honor and manhood. I inveigled her father into a pecuniary obligation, and demanded his daughter as an equivalent — a work of supererogation, for he was but too ready to sacrifice her at the shrine of his god — gold.

“I thought to win her by unwearied care and devotion; but though ever gentle and irreproachable in demeanor, her young face, that grew whiter and thinner day by day, drove me to madness and the wine-cup. I became cruel and tyrannical. Our child was my aversion, for it was worshipped by the heart that was closed upon its father.

“With her died all my hopes. I plunged deeper into dissipation, and the gaming-table completed my ruin.

“I fled in despair, and left my helpless boy to the tender mercies of chance.

“Years passed away, and I wedded again — a fair young girl, who gave me her whole heart; and for a time I forgot, in her love, my former degradation and misery. But a change came and I fell, to rise *too late* to retrieve all that was lost!

“But you know all that. Months ago, I told you, when I stood before you, after the lapse of many years, in the character of a Temperance Lecturer. *Temperance!* it has been my salvation! In an hour when the good angel wrestled and prevailed, I pledged myself to total abstinence from the ‘enemy that steals away the brain;’ — and from that hour I have been a reformed man.

“I remembered my poor lone boy, and to make some amends for the past I went to the land of gold. I succeeded beyond my expectations, and turned my steps homeward. A spirit of romance came over me, and I assumed a stranger-guise. I watched you narrowly, and soon found that my boy and your girl were destined to make us forget past

enmity, by a union of names and fortunes; for I knew you too well to doubt your consent, on the ground of pecuniary considerations. I waited the result, and it has come."

Mr. Redmond started up, buoyantly.

"By Jove, it was the 'leventh hour! I saw what the mischief was, and had to practise deception upon the young gentleman's credulity, or the end would not have been yet! The boy's as proud as Lucifer!—hanged if he ain't, by Jupiter!"

Aunt Cora forgot, for a time, her great grief for "Miss Bert's" absence, over the glorious news of "Mars Wallie's good luck;" and little Dick turned a glad somerset as he pitched out of the kitchen-door on a brisk run for the parlor, "to git a good look through de crack at Mars Wallie's bran-new pa!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BERTHA THE BEAUTY IN BERKSHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS.

IT was a sober, sweet September evening — Martha Stanhope called it "afternoon," as she parted with a neighbor at the kitchen-door.

Silas was shelling corn for the pig, and "Newt" was killing flies on the red cow, when the stopping of a carriage at the door aroused all parties.

"I swan, if there ain't Horace!" said Silas, in a shiver.

"Good land! — and his wife!" exclaimed Martha, under her breath.

"Where's my new trousers, mother?" whispered "Newt," springing in from the cow-pen in a flutter.

Newt was twelve years of age, and was beginning to feel manly ; besides, he had caught a glimpse of Bertha's beautiful face, and felt a sudden impulse to look as well himself as circumstances would allow.

"Git eout, yeou!" said Martha, giving her boy a poke with her nervous hand — "'tain't Sunday!"

Newt sniffed, notwithstanding his manhood ; but curiosity got the better of his indignation. He crawled over Martha's bed, and peered through the small window at the descending stranger — his "Southern aunt."

"*A-i-n'-t* she a beauty, mother ! Jiminy crimony —"

"Hush that!" commanded Martha, tying on a clean apron with all speed. "I want yeou should stop swearin', or I'll —"

"Golly ! that ain't swearin', mother — he-aw ! Deacon Smith says it."

"Deacon Smith ain't no better 'n he should be, then ! Don't yeou let me catch yeou talkin' after Deacon Smith so fash !"

Silas jerked on his coat, in honor of a stranger's arrival, and met his visitors at the gate, with a little timidity perceptible in his sun-burnt face.

"Wall, neow, I be rale glad tew see ye, Horace, and —" he glanced modestly at our heroine.

"My wife, brother Silas, — your sister Bertha."

"How d'ye *do*," said Silas, taking the little hand with a grip that was pleasant when he let it go — "I swan tew man if I ain't pleased tew see ye at larst ! 'Lonzo said yeou'd be along our way some time, but we'd a'most give up hopin'. Come in an' rest, won't ye ? Guess yeou're abeout tuckered eout, ben't ye ?"

Bertha looked at Horace with silent wonder. She had never heard the Yankee language spoken to perfection before.

Horace's handsome mouth dropped on one side with amusement, as he looked at her, and followed Silas into the "keepin'-room."

Martha's greeting was quite as cordial as her lord's, with less timidity. She was a genuine, whole-hearted, home-made woman; and Bertha felt her goodness at a glance. Her home-sickness wore away in Martha's presence.

Our heroine would have taken more to Silas, but for his bare feet — the sight of them repelled her by the vulgarity of the display.

But Bertha learned to feel more kindly towards her new brother-in-law during their three weeks' stay under his humble roof. His kind heart drew her irresistibly towards him, despite his plebeian appearance and amusing style of address.

Little Martha, the eldest girl, of four summers, crept timidly up behind our heroine's chair, and softly kissed the cheek of "Aunt Berta."

Bertha drew the shy but loving little creature upon her lap, and pressed her lips upon the modest little mouth, entering into a conversation with the timid thing with such familiarity and interest that the child's warm heart was very speedily and effectually won.

She crept back into the kitchen, where poor Newt was skulking in dirty clothes, and clapped her bits of hands gleefully, exclaiming:

"I dooz love Aunt Berta — I dooz! I ben't one bit 'feard of 'er now, Newt — goody!"

"Where's Newton?" inquired Horace, when the younger children had all paid their respects to the visitors.

Martha laughed, shutting her eyes so tightly during the process, that Bertha's orbs twinkled.

"Newt's ashamed tew let his new aunt see him without his Sunday go-tew-meetin's on! I guess his pride'll be his pizen, ef he lives long!"

Horace slipped into the kitchen, and dragged Newt from under the bed and into the "keepin'-room," blushing like a peony in the presence of the Southern stranger. Tears of mortification stood in his youthful eyes.

Bertha took his little hard hand and kissed his boyish mouth so kindly, smoothing his young crown so familiarly, that Newt looked up in astonishment. His awkwardness wore away gradually, until the bright boy evidently forgot his work-clothes in listening to and admiring his "beautiful and good-hearted new aunt."

Our heroine's eyes wandered over the supper-table with quick but suppressed surprise. Pickles and pork, potatoes and pies, custard and cake, coffee and tea, were all there! And Bertha observed that the family removed the pickles with their *fingers*! She wondered if they would the pork, and was gratified to find the Southern style was practised in that respect—but she made no comments. She avoided carefully all remarks that might have a tendency to hurt Horace, or annoy his friends.

She looked around at the high mountains shutting her in from the world, and requested Horace to point out the *South*. Then her yearning gaze went off in that direction, and her aching heart climbed over the tall rocks, and stood silently in her dear, old, deserted home.

What had she suffered since she left that home! How had she been disappointed and shamed by the discovery of a new trait in her husband's character—him, for whom she had left all, and followed to a strange land!

But Bertha did not know all then. She was not aware of the humiliating fact that their board was unpaid on Greenwich Street; that their landlady had suffered Horace Stanhope to leave her house without cancelling his debt, glad to get rid of him on such easy terms! The poor widow was quite loth to trust him for a longer stay, and relied

upon his city brothers for indemnification for the past. Bertha only knew she had to go supperless up the Hudson, the night previous, as Horace had only means to pay their passage to Berkshire, exclusive of board; and how he obtained that she never knew. She had casually learned his indebtedness to her Carolina friend, and shame and disgust crimsoned her cheeks, and curled her expressive lips.

But Bertha made no complaint and uttered no word of reproach. He was kind to her, and she would test him to the furthest extent of patience and forbearance.

Bertha called him kind, because he had uttered no profane word in a towering passion, and shed tears in a state of after repentance. But Bertha knew the green snake was yet in its nest, neither killed nor scotched. It had reared its reptile head and hissed threateningly on several occasions, since she left her home, notwithstanding she had left all to follow him!

Her Carolina friend had come in for a good share of his snakeship's spite; and Horace had abandoned Old Point Comfort a day in advance of his benefactor, to avoid his further gallantry towards his lovely young wife! Bertha found there was neither gratitude nor spark of sensibility in Horace Stanhope's nature, when she learned the imposition deliberately practised upon his kind and magnanimous Carolina friend.

Why had he molested her in her peaceful and plenteous home, and half forced her away from tender relatives and faithful friends, if he had not the means necessary to defray her expenses to his own land, and furnish her with food, when there?

Was that *love*, which deprived the object of every comfort of life, and held it in bands of tyranny, subject to its own selfish and arbitrary will?

Bertha was growing sceptical of Horace Stanhope's love. Now that he had her away from the home-roof, he made less

effort to keep up the appearance of honesty and industry for their support, and playfully ridiculed her conscientious scruples relative to his dishonest course.

Bertha found Horace Stanhope was content to live upon others' bounty, without any exertions of his own. He had refused a situation in New York simply because it was too laborious, and took him several squares from her during the day. He had, heretofore, had her beneath the same roof of his business establishment, or so near that he could watch her from the window.

Mr. Belmont had erected a store in his yard for the devoted young husband's accommodation, and Bertha never left her home, or received a call, but Horace Stanhope was close at hand.

Now that she was wholly in his power, as he imagined, (for Horace Stanhope deemed his frail, *leaning* wife incapable of strong and *secret* efforts to liberate herself from bondage,) Hume and Voltaire revived, in all their fearful force, in his spirit, and Bertha shrank, shudderingly, from the infidel principles.

How unlike the pious sentiments he had penned a few weeks ago, when he was at her mercy and had an object to accomplish. Now she was in *his* power, and the mask was no longer needed, and Horace Stanhope dropped it as an incumbrance.

He said, shamelessly, "his great love for her had induced him to make a virtue of necessity, knowing her Puritan principles; and he was none the worse for his faith; he loved her with his belief, and she did not love him with hers! He had not perjured himself at the bridal altar, but she had! Which was the better of the two? He was just as God made him — could n't make himself otherwise; and he was not responsible for his actions or belief!"

Bertha discovered he had veered from infidelity to Uni-

versalism — converted, no doubt, under the eloquent orations of that popular champion of salvation for rogues — Chapin!

She wondered if he would not be proselyted to the *true faith* under the *political preachings* of that highly-gifted and higher-salaried popular favorite — Henry Ward Beecher.

But Bertha did not attempt to combat his faith; she knew her impotence, and endured his mingled mirth and sarcasm in silence, veiling her eyes to hide their spirit-fire.

Twice they had been separated, each time under different circumstances; twice she had trusted and hoped. The third time would be fatal. Now that she had ventured *all*, she would bear and forbear, so long as bearing and forbearing was a duty and a virtue.

Horace Stanhope fancied her utterly helpless in his grasp. He guarded her all day long, and knew she had no friends at command. He insisted upon reading her letters home, and never allowed her to have the first perusal of one from her friends; Bertha invariably received them with broken seals.

He kept her in ignorance of her city relatives, and Bertha left New York for Massachusetts without the knowledge of their locality.

And now, as she stood, with longing gaze going up the black sides of the granite mountains that shut her in from all she loved best, and whose lives were bound up in hers, memory was active, and *the face* looked over the lonely hills from the sweet South, and deepened her distress.

Bertha never saw *that face* distinctly, only in her darkest hours of yearning and remorse. It grew faint in the sunshine, but full in the shade. It was a living reproach for the weakness of the past.

Horace Stanhope's keen eyes saw the shadow deepening in her homeward gaze, and a fierce light gleamed from the green orbs.

"She was grieving for her old lovers," he said, as he drew her away, and then kissed the small mouth, with the manly assurance that "it was only in fun," when he saw moisture in her eyes.

When Martha found herself alone with Silas, she half whispered, lest the visitors should overhear:

"Neow ben't she a beauty? I dew say!"

"She's pooty as a pictur, I swan!" said Silas, peeling off his coat with all speed, in which he had been victimized all the evening out of respect for his company.

But Silas's self-sacrifice stopped there. He could not encase his feet in shoes; *that* was beyond his constitutional strength. He had a natural repugnance to shoes, except as a protection against Jack Frost.

"I swan tew man," he continued, "if I don't pity the child! She's smilin' and sweet as a basket o' chips, but there's a look out'n her eyes that ben't good for gladness. Sure's a gun, it ben't all right inside of her 'pearance, mother."

"Seems like she dooz look for something that's lost, when she ben't talkin'. Her eyes look away beyant ye, when ye look in 'em; makes me feel kind o' queer sometimes. But Horace don't let 'er think long. How that fellow dooz keep fussin round!"

"He's too proud of 'er for her good, I calc'late. I don't like that grievin' look out'n her eyes—that's *so*! I'd like tew know if she loves him; a body can't tell from her looks, I swan!"

"I guess she dooz, or she would n't be here. I wonder how Horace got 'er away from the old folks; did n't 'Lonzo tell?"

"No; the fellow was clus-mouthed as a chestnut-bur. I never did see the beat of it, 'fore day! I knowed some 'n was up when that fellow cut so shy, I swan!"

"Guess not. Horace is tender of 'er as a suckin' babe, and she seems tew feel thankful for his kindness. I don't see no cause for complaint nowhere."

"Wall, I hope you 're right, but I have my doubts; them eyes don't look right, tew my mind. Who ever saw such hands, I 'd like tew know!—hardly a mite bigger than our little Mat's, and white as two snow-flakes at that! Them hands never done no work, you may bet—and Horace poor as stunny ground! I swan tew man, if that hand did n't feel like a bit o' gun-cotton when she put in mine! I'm afraid I squoze it a mite too many, not bein' used tew such hands; for she squinched, and looked a bit hurt, poor child!"

The advent of a Southerner in Yankee land aroused the curious all around. Horace Stanhope's beautiful Southern wife drew many inquisitive hearts to Silas's humble home.

Our heroine was pained to see no young faces among them all. Even the children had a hard, ancient, weary look. And then their conversation was startling to Southern ears. It was of washing clothes, haying, selling butter and cheese, and the sin of slavery, and Southern chivalry.

Bertha bit her lip with suppressed amusement, and veiled her eyes from the honest, humble, and toil-hardened natives. Then she sighed more deeply for her own dear refined Southern land.

CHAPTER XL.

BERTHA'S LIFE IN BERKSHIRE.

UNCLE ENOS" was the boast of the Stanhope race—an elder brother of Horace's father, and worth eighty thousand dollars.

Bertha had heard of "Uncle Enos" until her curiosity was alive to behold that ancient and distinguished individual. She hoped, also, to see something of Southern style and refinement under the roof of one of his means.

The mode of living of those whose acquaintance she had formed in the old Bay State, was rather beneath that of the lowest class of Carolina backwoodsmen. Bertha longed for something of a different type.

Silas was a "well-to-do farmer," but the poorest Southerner she had ever known was his superior in gentility, both in person and domicile. She liked the humble-minded man for his warm heart and evident interest in the young stranger, but there was not a home air about his *personnel* and premises.

They were going to "Uncle Enos's" to spend the day — a distance of three Yankee miles; which means, simply, twice that number, taking into the reckoning the ups and downs of the way. You may travel double the distance on Southern soil, and save your brain-pan and backbone into the bargain.

Silas brought out the Jersey wagon, and the four married Stanhopes filled it to surfeiting—including the baby in Martha's lap.

"Newt" was left to take care of the three younger ones and the cat, with instructions "tew milk the ke-ows, and give the pig a bit o' swosh, if they did n't git tew hum afore dark."

"Uncle Enos's" house was a two-story frame, set upon a hill, with a narrow yard in front bounded by a low fence, and no flowers or flowering shrubs around. The dwelling had thirsted for paint many years, and had grown dry and withered for the want. It reminded Bertha of a broken-down Carolina country aristocrat.

All around looked lonely and sighing, in the sadly shim-

mering September sunshine. The everlasting mountains frowned down on every side heavy and grim, as the iron portals of a State penitentiary, shutting her in from the sweet hopes of sunnier life beyond!

The family consisted of the old people and two sons, two hired girls and one man.

"Uncle Enos" was a little, withered-up, weather-beaten man, of seventy odd years; he might have been a centenarian from appearance. His bright blue eyes twinkled like stars in December, and looked quite as cold; but his heart was seemingly as warm as his hand was hard. He was exceedingly fond of "fun" and "young folks." His dress was decent, but home-made. He had shoes on his feet!

"Aunt Nancy" was a large, fat, blue-eyed, dignified old lady, with a pleasant smile and pleasing address. Bertha leaned towards her at first sight. There was more refinement in "Aunt Nancy's" mind and manners than our heroine had met with in Massachusetts.

The old lady was afflicted with lameness, and moved about slowly and painfully; but every movement was dignified and self-conscious. Her antecedents were, obviously, superior to her surroundings. She was a native of Connecticut. "Uncle Enos" had transplanted her from an ancestral conservatory to a kitchen-garden. In inherent possessions and powers she rose superior to the drudgery of every-day life. Her individuality was plainly perceptible—it had not been absorbed by his. She commanded the highest respect of her husband, children, and friends. Bertha loved her.

Jason, the elder son, was a small, modest, hard-working man of twenty-two, indifferently educated, and engaged to be married. Jason blushed like a girl at the bare mention of matrimony. He was amiable as he was ignorant, and timid as he was industrious.

Gideon, or "Gid," as he was invariably termed by all but his mother, was a six-footer, and well filled out; was inclined to be literary, but his orthography was excruciating. His limited education vetoed his would-be authorship. His letters were good for grief. A "blue-devil" would fly before them as fast as raw recruits from a regular army. But Gid inherited his mother's nature, and would have made a superior man with proper cultivation; but "Uncle Enos" bound him to the "farm," and dwarfed his genius. He was but nineteen, notwithstanding his mature proportions.

Gid had a bright eye for beauty, and no caution to cover his honest admiration with; and Horace Stanhope's watchful eyes glittered with green fire, as Gid made no secret of his regard for Bertha.

Horace soon found his uncle's home very uncomfortable quarters; but prudence held him in patient bonds a while. He was dependent upon his relatives, and must submit to the exigencies of his condition; but Bertha felt the torture he endured. He could not suffer her to rest while he was in pain.

Horace Stanhope would have declined his uncle's invitation to visit a while with them, had he been independent in purse; but there was no alternative, and he glowed a mortal week with jealous rage, provoked by Gid's innocent admiration of, and boyish attachment to "Cousin Bertha."

They had been but a day domiciled at "Uncle Enos's," when Horace entered our heroine's chamber, and asserted, with clouded brow and low-pitched tone:

"You've been telling Uncle Enos that I am jealous!"

Bertha looked up in astonishment.

"I have?"

"Yes, *you* have; and you dare not deny it!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Stanhope; I have never spoken

to him on the subject — I have too much self-respect ;” her lip curled.

Horace subsided forthwith. With all his mean-mindedness, he never doubted her veracity. He never looked into those clear, soul-full eyes, and declared, seriously, he questioned her truth. He was a queer compound of consistency and meanness. He loved her, and relied upon her honor ; yet he was jealous of her love, and was not content to make himself miserable — she must share his wretchedness. He was happy when he could torment her to tears, and miserable when she was apparently content.

Bertha smiled, aside, at the bare idea of her becoming enamored of ignorant, clownish, but good-natured Gid ; yet she did not betray her feelings in seeming or words. She did not inquire why he had suspected her of exposing his faults ; for her perceptions were sufficiently acute to discover “Uncle Enos’s” keen eyes had detected the truth, without the aid of her tongue, and that a remonstrance from the old man had sent Horace up-stairs rankling with spite. She had not forgotten his solemn promise to her, the day she left her home, to follow him to a stranger land ; but she did not remind him of it then. She would let the cloud pass over as softly as it might. But one truth was incontestable : Horace was as jealous of his own friends as he was of hers.

Horace Stanhope finally came to an open rupture with Gid, who dubbed him “Green-Eyes,” and took Bertha to Pittsfield to board, without any prospect of paying the bill. He professed to be in daily expectation of goods from “Cooley & Co.,” and affected preparations for opening a store in that pleasant town ; but time passed away, and the goods were not forthcoming ; and Horace took his wife back to New York, with funds borrowed from Silas, and paid his bill in Pittsfield through the same source.

“I swan tew man !” said Silas to Martha, shaking his

fist furiously at an imaginary Horace,—“I swan tew man, if that dog’s worth the powder it’d take tew blow ’im up! I would n’t a-done it, by hokey, ef it had n’t a-ben for her — poor child!”

Bertha did not cross the threshold of the hotel, during her stay in Pittsfield, until she left it for New York. Her time there was undisturbed by clouds and constant droppings, for she formed no acquaintance but that of the landlady, and a private table was laid for her lord’s accommodation; and Horace was at rest, relying upon his brother to liquidate his liabilities.

It was early morn when they arrived at the great Babel. Bertha looked weary and care-worn. She was tired — very tired of the life she was living, and yearned for a quiet, peaceful place to rest her frail form and aching heart.

She was forced to walk a long, weary way from the wharf to Alonzo’s, for Horace’s funds were expended, and the luxury of a hack was denied.

Alonzo and Hannah welcomed her kindly, and the poor, tired heart revived as a feeling of home-warmth came over it once more.

Horace sat down in his brother’s home in ease and indolence, while Alonzo was laboring for his support, until, in extreme disgust, Bertha secretly informed her father of her shameful and revolting situation, and expressed a desire to return home. She then acquainted Horace of her act and purpose. He was struck dumb with astonishment and wrath, a moment. Then came the violent storm, succeeded by the gradual lull, and finally the tearful entreaties.

Bertha reiterated her unwillingness to being dependent upon her brother-in-law, and bravely declared her determination to submit no longer to so humiliating a position.

Bertha evidently rose in her new relative’s esteem when the state of affairs was revealed by repentant Horace. She overheard Alonzo remark to Hannah, subsequently:

"I said she was honorable. I wish Horace was!"

Horace Stanhope now bestirred himself to avert the impending calamity of losing his lovely and daring wife. He was confounded by her temerity. He had thought her wholly in his power, when, lo! she had shown herself capable of more energy than himself!

"How had she smuggled that letter into the post-office?"

"Alonzo had taken it for her, without being aware of its contents, or of Horace's practice of reading all she wrote."

Stanhope shut his teeth hard with impotent rage. He dared not come to a rupture with Alonzo, for he well knew his brother would defend Bertha against him. He had playfully kissed her, on one occasion, in the presence of Hannah and himself; and Horace was as jealous of his own brother as he had been of Gid.

Bertha was lectured in secret for too familiar deportment towards an old married man! — and Alonzo's quick perceptions soon detected the gangrene of his brother's mind.

Through the influence of his brothers, Horace Stanhope again obtained goods of "Cooley & Co.," and made preparations for commencing business on Sixth Avenue. Bertha had consented to remain with him, if she could do so without detriment to her sense of honor.

When Stanhope returned, one evening, he observed a gentleman bidding adieu to Bertha, with more familiarity than was agreeable to Green-Eyes.

"Who was that?" he snapped out.

"Pa's cousin — Mr. Averley."

"The devil! How did he find you?"

"Pa gave him my address."

"Your pa 'd better mind his own business. What did the fellow want?"

"To see me."

"A very great honor! Is that all?"

"He wished to aid me in returning home, at pa's request."

"By ——! I won't stand this much longer! They can't let me alone, now that I am away from them. You are my wife, and no man shall take you from me by force."

"But I can go, if circumstances render it advisable. I told you, Mr. Stanhope, I had written home for means to relieve me from a humiliating situation, and pa has only granted my request. Let your wrath fall upon *me*, and spare your abuse of the innocent. *I* can bear it. I have grown callous from long custom. You promised me, if I would trust you once more, I should never repent my confidence, so help you God! You said if I were not content here, you would return me to my home. I told you then you would forget your promise, in the future, as you had in the past. Did I say right, Mr. Stanhope?"

Horace Stanhope said not a word, as he walked the floor and looked at the firm young face before him, with a puzzled, irresolute expression. Then the thought of her escape from *La Violet Seminary* came over him. She was very pliable when rightly managed, but could not be forced against her will — he knew that — without bolts and bars; and then the witch always found friends everywhere, to protect her from her foes. Alonzo and Allyn would both sustain her; and then there was that Averley relative just popped up — one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the city of New York. Stanhope knew him well by reputation; and he knew, also, he would not venture to beat his featherless wings against that rock. He had kept her in ignorance of her city friends, but her father had foiled him.

At length he said, mournfully, mastering his ire:

"And so you are going home, Bertha?"

"No, Horace; I told you I would remain, if we could live independently. I will not leave you so long as we can

live together in peace and honor. But I could not consent to be a burden to your friends."

Horace Stanhope was tender and true many days after this great relief from imminent danger.

He took her to a little room in the rear of his store, and kept her hidden from the world; passing most of his unemployed time with the little recluse, and watching for customers through a glass door that intervened.

Mr. Averley informed the city relatives of Mr. Belmont of his daughter's locality; and the bitter cold winter passed more pleasantly than our heroine had anticipated.

But Bertha did enter a church but twice during her six months' residence in the city. She was at his mercy there, for she dared not venture alone, and shrank from exposing him to her friends.

Mr. Belmont, finding his daughter would not return to him, made preparations to dispose of his property at a sacrifice, and go to her. Mrs. Belmont's health was failing fast, and Claude urged the exchange. But ere the time of departure arrived, Mr. Belmont received a line from Bertha, which ran: "*Don't come. I am going home.*"

And impatiently she waited an explanation.

CHAPTER XLI.

HORACE STANHOPE'S THIRD FAILURE. — BERTHA RESOLVES AND EXECUTES.

HORACE STANHOPE had been doing business for Cooley & Co. but four months, when there was a sudden stop in the mercantile machinery. Something was evidently wrong, but Bertha was not permitted to know the

why and wherefore. She knew he had sold a great many goods, and affairs *looked* prosperous.

She was surprised, one day, by the entrance of Horace into her hermitage, followed by two gentlemen. Mr. Cooley, she recognized; the stranger was introduced as Mr. Harman. This, then, was the firm with whom Horace had been dealing.

Bertha's heart sank beneath a heavy presentiment of evil as she looked into Horace's eyes. As Colonel Wilmer had once said, there was a "sneaking, snaky look about him" that chilled her. He had the appearance of one who had been caught in some dishonest act, and was trying to wriggle out of the net.

Bertha sat quietly and listened attentively. Messrs. Cooley & Co. were dissatisfied with the phase of affairs, and Stanhope's business must be brought to a sudden termination. Bertha learned that much, but the groundwork of the cause of their dissatisfaction was couched in too obscure language for her comprehension. Horace evidently understood it, from the hue of his countenance; he was livid—whether from rage or shame, Bertha could not decide. He never blushed, whatever his feelings might be; anger or confusion turned him deathly white.

The "firm" was exceedingly gentlemanly, and kind as circumstances would justify, but they could no longer supply him with goods upon such terms as he had heretofore been receiving them.

Here then was another cheat! If Cooley and Co. had been paid promptly, they would not have brought matters to a sudden close. Stanhope, evidently, was indebted for the goods sold, and what *had* he done with the proceeds? There was another Belmont affair over again!

Bertha knew the profits had not been expended for her. His brothers, Alonzo and Allyn, had given her more than

Horace had, since she came to the city. She had even been compelled to sleep on a straw mat during the entire bitter cold winter, to save the expense of feathers; but she had not complained nor hinted of her comfortable home-quarters far away. Her board was very reasonable, with an honest, humble Irish family beneath the same roof.

And yet, with all the economy they had practised and his rapid sales, he was a defaulter to the firm — to what amount she never knew.

Stanhope led the way from the room, saw the firm safely out, and came back in a passion.

"What was that fellow doing?" he asked, with a black brow.

"Which one, and when?"

"Oh, you need n't try to deceive me! I saw it all."

"I don't wish to deceive you, Mr. Stanhope. What did you see?"

"I saw that rascal Harman kiss his hand to you as he left!"

"Is there any harm in that? And if there is, am I responsible for it?"

"I should think there was harm — a married man kissing his hand to a married woman! If you'd conducted properly, he would not have taken the liberty — the knave!"

"You can judge of the propriety of my conduct; you were present during their stay. I did not utter a dozen words while they remained, and I think I looked up but twice. I should have thought it rude in an utter stranger, but for the evident pity and respect that beamed in his eyes. I know but little, as yet, of your Northern style, and I meant to ask you if it was a common custom among Yankees."

"Yes, it's very likely I should have heard of it, if I had n't seen the insult from the villain!"

"I don't consider it an insult, Mr. Stanhope; he is too gentlemanly to offer one."

"Certainly! of course you like it! You've got a new lover at first sight!"

"If I have, it's no fault of mine. If it's an insult, I am powerless to resent it. I have had to submit to a great many unpleasant things since I left my home. I said it would be so, but you would not leave me in peace. If you are offended by people's regard for me, you have only yourself to censure. You can very speedily rid yourself of the annoyance by sending me home."

That softened him. His temper cooled, and he wilted down under the suggestion. Wrath blinded his reason when jealousy was aroused, and led him to the extent of abusing her for others' offences, until a hint of home subdued his rage.

Had Horace Stanhope possessed the nerve, he would have murdered her in a moment of jealous frenzy; but his love of life was too strong, and his cowardice too great, for even seething passion to render him insensible of danger. Bertha had received so many proofs of his pusillanimity, that she had ceased to feel any apprehension relative to her personal safety.

Horace Stanhope changed his tone and the subject as he cooled off.

"And now the rascals have thrown me out of business, and we'll have to go back to Alonzo's."

"As poor as we left," she said, dryly.

"Yes, and worse! I can't pay the rent, now that the villains have closed me up, to save the world! I could have done well if they'd left me alone; I was just getting a good start and plenty of custom."

Bertha wondered at the man's effrontery. He was throwing the fault from his own shoulders upon theirs, as he had

done upon her father, and that, too, before her wide-awake eyes!

They went back to Alonzo's "on the sly," and the proprietor of Horace Stanhope's mercantile establishment never saw his rent-dues! Mrs. James, the landlady, indemnified herself from the store, or she would have shared the same fate as their former landlady and the landlord.

Bertha was entirely broken down in spirit. Horace Stanhope manifested no concern, saying that of being discovered by his creditors. He kept close to the premises, and lived upon his brother's bounty until Bertha wrote her father:

"Don't come. I am going home."

Horace Stanhope was urging her to go with him farther North into the country, when she wrote her friends in desperation. She said, firmly:

"I will never go farther away from home than I now am, Mr. Stanhope. I have suffered enough here."

He fretted and fumed, snuffled and sulked; but Bertha's weakness was all gone — he pleaded in vain.

Horace Stanhope was startled, one day, to see the head clerk of Cooley & Co., accompanied by other fellow-associates, enter his brother's home and inquire for Mrs. Horace Stanhope. He did not appear before them, but awaited their departure in an agony of suspense. They looked pleased and tormentingly polite when they left the parlor. Green-Eyes saw it all in secret.

"What's going on now?" he asked, with half frightened eyes.

"Pa has sent me funds to take me home. I am going home to-morrow, Mr. Stanhope. Messrs. Cooley & Co. are pa's agents in the matter."

"The hell they are! How did they know where to find you?"

"They have my address."

"By ——! And so you have betrayed me to them!"

"I was not aware of a desire on your part to elude *them*. I thought——"

"You thought! You had no business to think without consulting *me*!"

"I take the liberty of thinking independently, notwithstanding your lordship. I am a *Southerner*, Mr. Stanhope."

He thought she was, from the fire in her face. It burnt him.

Bertha knew his weak points, and assailed him there, during his fits of insane passion. She never failed to bring him down with a fiery shot. She found the more she yielded the more he would impose; and she was forced, in self-defence, finally to turn upon him her spirit-battery, to keep him at bay.

Horace Stanhope quailed before the flash of her eye, and his fury oozed away. He fell across the bed and sobbed like a boy; reproaching her, in plaintive tones, for her cruelty in betraying him, and her contemplated desertion of one who loved her more than his own life.

But Bertha was not to be turned from her purpose this time. She had seen the end of the test-line, and there was no loop beyond to hang a hope upon. She was going home. She had strength enough to sustain, and friends sufficient to shield her. And she went.

CHAPTER XLII.

BERTHA ABANDONS A JEALOUS TYRANT.

IT was a bright blue morn in February, when Bertha bade adieu to the great sin-laden city of New York, where so many wretched days and months of her young life

had been passed, and turned her sad face Southward. She was sad even to tears, for her hopes lay in ruins. There was no longer a star in the dim horizon of her heart to lead her hopefully in the future. She was on the wide ocean of life, drifting without a helm.

Horace was broken down by her firmness, but powerless to prevent her desertion; and his grief-full face filled her with sorrow, notwithstanding the past, and want of confidence for the future.

He had put on his most penitent seeming, to turn her from her purpose; but Bertha knew how long it would last if she relented, and what would come after. She steeled her heart, and went firmly forward.

Had Horace Stanhope been brave and manly, he might have led her to the end of the world; but she had tested him thoroughly, and could trust him no longer, away from her friends. They had suffered enough in the past, and she would no longer punish them and herself for one so worthless.

Bertha went like a stoic, but her heart ached for the unhappiness she was leaving, in one who had wrought it by his own unworthiness.

"Look, Mrs. Stanhope," said the good old man to whose care her friends had confided her.

Bertha turned her eyes in the direction indicated, and far away in the blue distance fluttered a white signal. Horace Stanhope had followed the steamer that bore away his long-suffering wife, to the extremest point, and waved her farewell from the Battery.

Bertha answered it, and the white handkerchief floated in the morning breeze until distance shut it from her sight. Then she went down to her state-room, and her full heart overflowed in tears, until a swift memory came and dried them up like summer drought. If she were in his power,

how would he exercise it for her unhappiness. How had he repaid her trust and sacrifice for his sake. How dishonest he had proven himself toward those who had befriended him in his extremity. There was no gratitude, independence, or integrity in him. He was a jealous tyrant, content to be a burden to his relatives!

Bertha Belmont "despised meanness;" and reflection upon the true character of Horace Stanhope, of which she possessed a thorough knowledge, sent her back to the deck with a feeling of freedom in her young heart that had long been a stranger to her breast. Like a long-imprisoned bird just escaped from its cruel captor, she shook her glad spirit wings, and mounted upward from her late tormentor.

Bertha had vowed, solemnly, in her secret heart, when she firmly resolved to leave her worthless husband to his fate, that she would never return to him until he had proven himself worthy of respect and confidence. But Horace Stanhope was ignorant of that vow, and trusted to time and absence to win her back, as subsequent events clearly demonstrated. But our heroine had drank of the cup he prepared, and declined to drain it to the dregs, until it was sweetened with the "repentance that needeth not to be repented of."

God tempered the wind to the shorn lamb, for the great ocean lay, like a lion, asleep; and not a growl or threatening aspect disturbed the equanimity of our heroine, as the gallant bark that bore her to her waiting friends, steamed through the seething waters.

Bertha felt grateful to Him who rules the waves, when the old captain said he "had never made so quick and pleasant a time in many a year — shiver his timbers!"

There was evidently no Jonah aboard of that ship!

Old Virginia! Bertha's thin face brightened when she opened her eyes, one morning, and beheld the sacred soil of the Mother of Presidents. Broad, beautiful, sunny lands,



sweeping far away as eye could reach. How unlike the rocky hollows, hedged in by frowning granite hills, with a patch of wintry sky above and a feeling of frost beneath!

Bertha clasped her small hands, and thanked God that the sweet, sunny South was her home.

Majestic Potomac! How she loved its blue waters that flowed from a Southern fountain. The skies looked bluer and softer, and unresurrected Nature fairer, in a Southern atmosphere. Silent, solemn, beautiful Mount Vernon lands! rising abruptly and greenly from the river's rim, and sweeping back and far beyond the ancient roof that sheltered the venerable head of the *Pater Patrie*!

Grand old Fort Washington! — smiling down from its emerald height as innocently as though no iron instruments of death lay hidden behind its heavy, deceitful walls!

On, through the white foam and hissing waters; on through the singing breezes and purpling twilight; and our heroine, straining her brown eyes through the evening mist, to catch the first glimpse of the strange city where her loved ones looked and longed for her coming, was "safe at home!"

Home — but not beneath the loved roof of her childhood! Home — but not among the familiar faces that smiled upon her six long, weary, grief-laden months ago! Home — but not with the blue, sunny skies of her native State shining over her!

And yet it was *home* to our heart-sick heroine, for her foot touched Southern soil, and her best-loved ones and most faithful were there. Here she could rest her fading form and fainting spirit, undisturbed by jealous clouds and repentant showers.

Here she would not be pulled continually from pillow to post by a dishonest debtor, creeping under cover of darkness from his creditors, without a tinge of shame upon his brazen cheek, — and sit down in humiliating dependence

beneath the roof of those upon whom she had no claim but that which humanity and, worst of all, *charity* recognizes.

Mr. Belmont had disposed of most of his real estate in Carolina previous to the reception of Bertha's letter communicating her design to abandon Horace Stanhope. Mrs. Belmont's health was declining, and Claude, just verging upon manhood, longed for change of scene.

They came to the Old Dominion, and settled down in a pleasant, quiet home, impatiently awaiting the arrival of our long absent and ocean-rocked heroine.

But few perfectly happy moments are realized by a human heart in a life-time; and Bertha experienced one of the few when Mr. Belmont and Claude entered the cabin and caught her up in their arms.

The kind-hearted captain lingered behind to witness the meeting, and turned away with a bright smile and quick dash of his honest hand across his eyes.

Bertha's wet eyes widened with astonishment as she looked upon Claude. The slender boyish form had grown to manhood in half a year; and Bertha's small head was forced to bend far backward to get a good look at his laughing face as it towered high above her.

Claude said he "had stretched himself to that length, reaching after her across such wide water and high hills."

Bertha said, in her home that night, with tender arms and glad faces around her:

"I'll never leave you again, mamma. I've seen the end of hope for Horace; and now I'll die at home."

"Not yet!" sang out Claude, starting up, and shuffling over the carpet with old-time boyishness, — "can't afford it just yet, sis! You belong to us now, and, dog *me*, if anybody else of the human stripe shall ever have you while 'bub's around!"

Uncle Ben poked his black, woolly head in from the

kitchen, and looked on in solemn silence a while at Claude's Terpsichorean performance. Then he said, soberly :

"Why don't ye mix it, young mass'r? You makes one foot do it all — he-a, he-a!"

Claude dropped down in a chair before this critical fire, and drew both feet under him, as though ashamed of their ignorance; and Uncle Ben's head disappeared suddenly, but his humorous mouth was heard in the distance.

Alone in her quiet chamber, its sweet silence unbroken by Horace Stanhope's complainings, reproaches, and iterations of affection unreturned, Bertha looked down the long lane of departed years, onward through the fate-shadowed future.

She had tried to do her duty as a wife, but all her efforts and sacrifices had been vain, and wholly unappreciated by him for whom they were made. She was at home once more, and she would never desert it again for one so undeserving of trust and respect. She had but little hope of his reformation, and a lonely, isolated life was before her. No hope of forming new ties, to brighten the pathway to another state of existence; but year after year to walk that pathway alone — shut out by a fatal vow from the nearest and dearest relationship known to mortals!

And what would the world say? *The world* — cold, unfeeling, heartless — it ever laid the burden upon the weak, and let the strong go free. Man might sin grievously, and be countenanced by *the world*; but woman must suffer for ever an *apparent* wrong!

How unevenly the scales of Justice are balanced in this wicked world!

But Bertha's conscience was at rest; and thoughts of what the world might whisper, of her living apart from her husband, did not trouble her spirit. She resolved to go firmly forward, in the straight and narrow way of duty to

those who loved her most, and obedience to her own convictions of right, and leave the rest to God.

But our heroine soon found *the world* was disposed to be more kind and favorable to her than it had shown itself to others in a similar situation. Her beauty and retiring nature softened its stony heart, and let its latent warmth, and wooing smiles, leak through its admiring eyes. It came around her with new songs of love; but Bertha sadly smiled, and informed them of the "insuperable barrier to the realization of their hopes."

They told her she might be free by "due process of law," and prayed her to suffer them to hope for a favorable answer in the future; but Bertha's heart was untouched, and she gently forbade the indulgence of a delusive dream for days to come.

Then *the face* came up from the South, and looked in at her; and she smiled. But the smile soon died away, and left her brown eyes weary and wandering.

"A letter from Green-Eyes!" and Claude held it up before her, with a turn-up-nose expression.

"What news from afar?" inquired Mr. Belmont, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and spit upon the carpet in aiming at the grate.

"Horace has left New York city, and is cashier of a Bank in Buffalo."

"Well, I pity *that* Bank!" exclaimed Mr. Belmont, dryly.

"Me too, Katy," said Claude, putting one finger on the end of his nose.

"Don't you?" continued Mr. Belmont, looking over his spectacles at silent Bertha.

"I am afraid it won't prosper, under the circumstances, unless —"

"Prosper! hang me if I don't believe it'll burst up in a week!" exclaimed Mr. Belmont, spitting furiously at the grate, and hitting the fender.

"Getting rich rapidly, and trying to coax you back to share his wealth with him, eh?" inquired the old father, facetiously.

Bertha laid the letter in his hand, and went up to her chamber. Mr. Belmont grunted, indignantly, as he read.

"Just as I expected. The rascal holds up a brilliant light and glittering lure; but he won't catch Bertha in a hurry, I'll wager. That child's got enough of the rogue, I *think*. Well, I would n't like to stand in the fellow's shoes that owns the most stock in that Bank," he said, soberly, as he pulled off his specks, and fed his mouth with "honey-dew" from his vest-pocket.

"Ain't it astonishing," he broke forth, after chewing and musing a while, "how that fellow can talk, after acting dog-mean for two years? Why, a stranger would think, from that loving epistle, he was the worst-used innocent that ever fell among thieves, and lost all but his honor and deathless devotion! Why, even his brother don't respect him. What a letter that was from Alonzo, since Bertha came back! One can see he pities and esteems her, which says plaguey little for his brother. And now, after all she knows of the rascal, he's just ninny enough to think he can coax her back with chaff! Well, he need n't try that on, to my mind, for Bertha's too old a bird, in suffering for his sins, to be caught again with anything but good bait—I'll wager."

Bertha was musing, in her chamber, with her round chin resting upon her small hand, and her introverted eyes turned towards her childhood's home. Bertha loved the south window, but her thoughts were not there then. She was thinking of the letter her father was commenting upon. She wondered if Horace Stanhope fancied she *could* be

deceived again? She marvelled at the tone of the missive, as though he could annihilate her memory at will, and force her to believe a falsehood. He might do well in Buffalo, as he might have done in Williamsville and New York city, but she doubted seriously if he remained there long, and did not leave it poorer than he went.

No penniless young man had ever been favored with better opportunities for accumulating wealth and rendering himself influential and honored by his fellows than Horace Stanhope; and yet he had deceived and injured his best friends by his dishonesty, and brought wretchedness upon his own head by his worthlessness.

And now he evidently thought to entrap her again by love-words and affected innocence. If she were with him then, what would her fate be? Stealing away from his employer in darkness, or visiting him in prison — left alone and desolate among utter strangers! Bertha shuddered at the thought.

Had he been honest, his poverty would not have driven her from him. Had he been honorable, she would have clung to him through all time. It is true she did not love him when they married, but there was a strange warmth and leaning in the wife's heart toward the husband, that the affianced had not felt for the lover. He might have won her whole heart by manly forbearance and kindness; and *the face*, that was but a romance of early girlhood, might have been hidden from her sight forever behind the dearer image of his own life.

It was only in hours of disappointment and remorse for having married one so unworthy, that *the face* looked up, through the long years, and reproached her. Were she with him now, she would be but a burden. Could she have aided him, in New York city, in honorable efforts for a livelihood, she would not have deserted him. Though accustomed to ease

and every indulgence at home, it would have been a satisfaction to her spirit of independence to assist him in his business; but Horace Stanhope's green life would not suffer her to appear before his customers.

Bertha drew a long sigh of relief as she felt her freedom from such thralldom as she had endured from Horace Stanhope, and she felt no desire to repeat the experience of the past two years. She only hoped he would not fall into deeper disgrace from his present situation in the Buffalo Bank.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. REDMOND SUSPECTS BERTHA'S SECRET.

O MY! O me!" and Edalia Eldon sprang into the office and danced around her husband and uncle, flourishing a letter as she went.

"What the deuce ails the girl!" exclaimed Mr. Redmond, looking after her, with his head in a whirl occasioned by her rapid movements. "Out with it, Ed."

"'Bertha the Beauty' has abandoned that rascal Stanhope for good and all, and is safely sheltered in the nest-home in Alexandria."

She dropped upon Walter's lap, and hugged him around the neck until he affected strangulation, and opened his mouth, gasping for breath, to the young wife's great amusement.

"For good and all!" growled Mr. Redmond. "That means, until he comes around her whining again, with new protestations of penitence for past villany and promises of

better behavior in future. He'll cheat her back again, I'll bet two chincapins — by Jupiter!"

"No. Bertha'll never leave her home again for any such rascal. She's run the full length of the test-line, and now, if he gets her, he'll have to 'put off' the old man with his deeds,' and furnish good proof of his honesty. I know Bertha; she won't trust him again until he's trustworthy. You may bet *all* your chincapins on that, uncle."

"Well; I hope so, for he's the most worthless scamp that ever owned a wife — by Jupiter! If she'd deserted him twelve months ago, it would have been better for her and her family, a dog sight! He's broke Belmont up bodily, for he sold his property for just nothing, to go to her; and now it can't be bought for double the amount that Mezer gave for it. I know *that*, for I tried it on, last court. It's about the finest location in town; and if Belmont had n't been crazy about his daughter, he never would have sold the house where his children were born — or, more properly speaking, *given* it away — for it's little more than that. Mezer made a great bargain there, and chuckles over it now. If I'd known the old man's intention, I would have saved him such a sacrifice. But some men's soul all lies in their pocket, both north and south of Mason and Dixon's."

"Poor Bertha grieves over the loss of 'the house where I was born,' and if she'd been aware of her father's design, he never would have sold it. But Mr. Belmont rented it eleven years, you know — during their residence in the low brown house with the long piazza — and had it so badly abused by tenants, he concluded it would be about the cheapest way to sell, especially as he expected never to return to Carolina. I'm sure, from the tone of this letter, Bertha would be happier in her old home, though she says nothing detrimental to her present one. Her description of

it is quite poetic. I shouldn't wonder a bit if Bertha turned authoress now, uncle."

"Why so, chatterbox?"

Mr. Redmond declared, with a merry twinkle of his blue eye, that "Ed, the *scamp*, had grown wild as a deer, and tormented him to death with her interminable tongue, since her marriage with the bug's nominee for President! He could n't muse a minute, or take a nap on the sofa, without having his hair pulled or a red rag tied to his coat-tail — by Jupiter!"

Edalia's temperament *had* changed wonderfully since her happy union with Walter Eldon. Her pensive cast had all vanished with her loss of individuality; and a happy heart made a merry countenance and music day-long in her sunshiny home. She was a loved and loving wife, and life lay blossom-crowned before her, seemingly one long unclouded summer-bright day.

"— Why so, chatterbox?"

"Because, uncle, it is said a poetic temperament only requires some adverse circumstance to develop its powers; and Bertha comes under that rule. She has the 'divine afflatus' in an eminent degree, and I think she certainly has 'learned in suffering' quite enough to 'teach in song.' I fancy I see premonitions of a literary career in this most remarkable letter." And Edalia read it aloud to the admiring gentlemen.

"Well, that reads like a book," said the old man, with a gratified snap of his bright eyes; — "'t would n't look bad in print, either. If Bertha ever tries her hand with the author's pen she'll succeed — I'll go my bet on that!"

And Bertha *had* tried and succeeded; but safely sheltered beneath a friendly *nom de plume*. She learned enough of her powers, and the appreciation of the public, in her secure retreat, to come forth bravely, at last, self-conscious and

self-sustaining; and twelve months after her abandonment of her worthless husband, "Bertha Belmont Stanhope" was favorably known to the literary world. She learned to live a new and happier life in the Vale of Tempe, than she had ever known in by-gone years; and her troubled spirit calmed in the lulling waters of Helicon.

Our heroine grew stronger in the daily exercise of scrambling up the rugged heights of Parnassus, where she caught warmer glimpses of the life far above this cold and sordid earth, from her ideal stand-point.

Mr. Redmond entered his home, one day, with a remarkably elastic step for a man of his age, and a queer smile about his eyes and mouth. He held an open paper in both hands.

Minnie was sitting with Edalia; and Charlie, her bright boy, was expressing his delight at the tiny white face in Walter's arms. Mr. Redmond was a grand-uncle, and made a wry face at the ancient sound.

"I say, Ed, it's come at last; you said so! But it's got the heart-ache, and I've caught it — poor child!"

"What is it, Uncle Ned?" and Minnie's eyes widened.

"Bertha Belmont Stanhope's first poem, in the 'Williams-ville Banner,' as pretty a bud as ever opened in springtime! but it's got a big bright tear in it, by Jupiter!"

"O-h-h!" and Minnie made a lunge at the paper, and succeeded in capturing it.

"We'll have more of the same sort, too; for the editor tells us 'he is happy to announce to his readers — many of whom are personally acquainted with the fair and gifted author — that he has been so fortunate as to engage her as a regular contributor.' Bertha's bound to shine in the literary galaxy, I see that. What's the matter, Min?"

"I've swallowed that tear, and it chokes me, Uncle Ned!"

"I thought so, by Jupiter! I'd like to see the heart that

would n't melt in that heat! It sounds just as Bertha used to look — plaintive and heart-broken. I wonder if that child did n't meet with some disappointment in early youth? She always looked as though she had lost something, and was trying to think where she had dropped it. I've always had the impression she was in love when she left the low brown house with the long piazza, but I never let it out before. Don't you girls know? There! I thought so, by Jupiter! What are you crossing eyes about? I won't let the cat out."

"Bertha has acknowledged as much, uncle; but I haven't the slightest clue to the discovery of the individual, unless it is Edward Redmond, Esquire, as I suggested, years ago. You would n't act upon the suggestion, and ask her?"

"Fiddlesticks! p-h-e-w! get out!" growled the old man, with a frowning brow and a dash of humor in his eyes. "May and December don't mate well, or I might have been tempted to try it, and save her from that green-eyed, graceless Stanhope. But seriously, young folks, I think I have the key that locks up the secret in Bertha's heart, and just shows its head in that poem."

"*Do* tell, Uncle Ned!" — and Minnie sidled up, coaxingly.

"Shan't do it till I'm convinced of the fact, and there's no danger of betraying what she has so long concealed. I've watched her too closely, from childhood, not to have read something of her hidden nature, and —"

"Oh, you have! — so, so!" interrupted Minnie, dipping down and peering significantly into his sober face, — "that lets the cat out on t' other side, Uncle Ned!"

"Oh, blast the — I mean, bless the girl! I can't walk soberly into a serious subject without getting my foot in the mud of a foreign and facetious matter. Hanged if I'll keep such company — by Jupiter!"

The old gentleman rocked himself out of the room, with an unusually red face, and both hands punching out his coat-flaps, with shouts of laughter following him from the "young folks."

"I wonder whom he suspects?" said Minnie, softly.

"Can't imagine," responded Edalia.

"The man in the moon," suggested Walter.

"Walter, maybe,"—and Minnie laid one rosy finger across her red mouth and looked cunningly around.

"Missed the mark, then. Bertha never loved me."

"How do you know?"

"I could n't be deceived. If she had, she might have won me when Ed was ice! I half died for some one to love me, when I was a poor, lone boy. But it's all over now," he said, hastily, as tears started to Edalia's eyes,—"and the darkness of the past only renders the present brighter."

CHAPTER XLIV.

BERTHA'S NERVES RECEIVE A SUDDEN SHOCK.

WHAT is it?"

Bertha was standing before the mirror, gazing half sadly at the image reflected therein.

And what was Bertha thinking about? And why the self-query?

She was wondering what it was in that pale, pensive face that was so attractive. *She* could see no beauty there, and wondered at the strange fascination that pale, pensive face possessed for others.

She had just parted with a new suitor—a stranger, and

minister of the gospel. Bertha was pleased by such a conquest, but his sad, half despairing eyes, as she informed him of her situation, pained her memory.

Edwin Langley had seen her yesterday for the first time; to-night he had declared himself her lover. Bertha was startled by the sudden and unlooked-for declaration. She knew his piety and worth by reputation; and the noble heart that ached in his expressive eyes at bidding her and his hopes farewell, pained her own sympathizing heart.

And our heroine stood before the mirror, in her silent chamber, and examined the pale, sickly, sad face, with its mournful brown eyes and small, grieving mouth, and marvelled at its strange power. Here, as in her childhood's home, she was still "Bertha the Beauty," though twenty-two years had gone over her head, and four of those years filled to overflowing with deep soul-suffering. Bertha wondered that the golden-brown curls, put plainly away from her veined forehead behind her small ears, were not as white as the marble-like cheeks they bordered, when she wandered through the past, in thought, and stood in the black shadows of her fate. She was not happy, for her life had been a failure—her girlish dreams of the future lay in ruins upon the wayside of the dead years, and she was alone, though surrounded by loving hearts. There was a great void in her life, that ached day-long and far into the night with its emptiness.

She had won fame with her fire-tipped pen; her poems were transcripts of the heart that wrestled with its dark destiny; and they took firmly hold of the heart that read, and showered back praise upon the author. But that did not satisfy. The poor lone heart that sang the low requiem of its earthly life ached on, and was hungry still.

"I say, sis,—do you remember Percy Ormund, the nice

young fellow who boarded a while with us in the low brown house with the long piazza?"

This was Claude's query to Bertha, as he came in from "down town," one day.

Our heroine's head was bent over the MS. before her, and Claude could not see her face. She had turned toward him, as he entered, with her accustomed smile of welcome; but ere the query was ended, the small head was bent lower than when he entered her presence, and the clustering curls fell over the face that was averted more than was necessary to accommodate her vision to the MS. before her.

"Yes, I do remember, now," she said, after a slight hesitation.

"Well, the old boy has been 'histed' to a high post in Carolina by the appreciating people. I've just seen the announcement in print."

"I want tew know!—yeou don't say!" said Bertha, turning full upon Claude, and screwing her small mouth facetiously.

"I swan tew man if it ben't a fact!—shiver my timbers!" responded Claude, catching at the reminder, and exploding with mirth.

"Well, I'm truly glad to hear of the old boy's luck," continued Claude, delightedly,—"he was just about the finest young fellow that ever stood five feet eleven in his boots before he was twenty. I'd like to know if he's grown much taller since 'old pod-anger days.' If he has, he don't have to pay tax in this country, now that he's twenty-nine! He was only nineteen then. How the years do fly!" he added, musingly, without looking at Bertha. "I was only twelve then, and now I'm twenty-two. Heigh-ho! quite an old man, and not married yet! I wonder if Percy is?"

"Beyond a doubt," said Bertha, scratching away with a pen, her head bent low over the sheet before her.

"The old fellow tried to get back as a private pupil of pa's, you remember, don't you?"

"I believe I have a faint remembrance," said Bertha, carelessly.

"And if pa had n't refused, we might know more about him now. A longer acquaintance might have led to something lasting. Who knows?" he asked, looking archly around; but Bertha's face was invisible.

"Tut!" she said, without lifting her veiled face; but comprehending his insinuation, "nothing but children we were."

"He was a pretty big child then, I must say. I wonder why he wished to return as a private pupil, with such educational advantages in his own city. You were a wee bit of a brat then, and I was too small for suspicion; but dog, if I don't smell a mice at this late day! I wish it had been a bee, for he was a noble young fellow; and then you would have missed that green-eyed, roguish Stanhope! I wonder where the rascal will turn up next, now that he's sold his handsome house, and left Batavia — ha, ha!"

"I can't imagine." Bertha dropped the pen, and turned around now. "Not here, I hope, with his reputation."

"It would n't be well for him!" growled Claude; "he'd carry off a coat of tar and feathers, if he did n't bring a better character than he's got up there! I wonder why the fellow don't leave the world, and take a tree to hide his infamous head! And then to tax his Yankee cunning to get you back, when he can't take care of himself, — the dishonest dog! I wish he'd keep his letters to himself — they're sickening!"

"He will, in future. He means to apply for a divorce, 'on the ground of abandonment,' unless I return. I shall write him no more."

"Good — by George!" shouted Claude, starting up with

a bound. "Go it, old green-eyes and rogue! — nobody 'll stop you!" he cried, jubilantly, overturning a chair, as he cut the pigeon-wing around the room.

"Well, that's the best news I've heard in six years!" he said, as he sobered down and replaced the chair. "I don't want that *name* hung on to mine any longer, and I would have cut it loose, long ago, if it could have been done. But as you deserted him, it made it a hard matter for you to clip it off. I thank the rascal for the only favor he ever did us in all his days, if, indeed, he does it now! I'm afraid it's too good to be true!"

"I shall know through Alonzo. I wrote him last night."

"And did n't tell me! Why did you keep dark?"

"I wished to get the truth first; but you drew me out."

"Well, the Lord knows I hope he'll put it through! And if he does, just drop that *name*, like a hot potato. It burns my pride and honor, I swan!" said gay Claude, laying himself back at full length in the old arm-chair, and opening his mouth with a long, heart-full laugh.

Bertha caught up the paper before her and went up the stairs, as Mr. Belmont entered the sitting-room. She trembled as she went, and her face was strangely white, but there was a burning light in her brown eyes, and a soft smile upon her delicate lips.

She did not sit down in her chamber, but wandered restlessly to and fro. Then she went to the mirror and scrutinized her countenance; but her eyes soon went by her own shadow, and she saw another face — *the face* that had followed her ten long, weary, struggling years! And Bertha looked into the mild, spiritual eyes, smiling faintly through the dark distance, as they had smiled in the low brown house with the long piazza, and her lips syllabled the name "Percy!" She had not breathed it before, since she stood at the bridal altar with Horace Stanhope.

But now she was free — his sins had separated them forever; and it was no wrong to breathe that cherished name. She was free to dwell in loving remembrance upon that face, but not free to wear his name, even if he were still unbound by silken fetters; and it was relief to her long-caged spirit to flutter away from its cold prison, and wander at will in the warm sunshine of early years.

He had in all probability forgotten her, the timid little child of fourteen, who had carried his memory in her heart, despite her efforts to shut it out, from a sense of duty and honor, and brought it up the long lane of the past to dwell upon Now without self-reproach; he would perhaps never know the lasting impression of his noble life upon the green leaf of a few short days in the "long ago;" but she was free to reflect now, and liberty was sweet.

A breath of childhood days came over her as she stood there dreaming, with face bowed upon her hand — a feeling of youth, and hope, and happiness.

He had never said he loved her, but Bertha felt its existence, when she met his beaming eyes in those sun-bright days, when they dwelt beneath the same moss-covered roof; and had he been permitted to return to the low brown house with the long piazza, how different might have been her fate!

She was too sensitive to intercede in his behalf when Mr. Belmont received his written request; she would have suffered martyrdom sooner than betray her heart-secret; and a negative answer was returned. It sealed her doom!

Bertha shuddered as she reached this point, and turned away from the contemplation of her fate.

Was it not strange, she mused, that his name had been sounded in her ear for the first time since that fatal nineteenth of June? — now that she was but just free to hear it spoken without an inward ache — a soul-longing and pain

that must have betrayed her to unsuspecting Claude, even though her face was concealed.

Had it been uttered in the presence of Horace Stanhope, she doubted her firmness to sustain the shock. But now she was free; and though Percy might be bound, she was innocent in heart in dwelling upon the memory of their early love, that budded far back in the silvery morn, and still blossomed on in the setting sunlight of ten long, weary, struggling years ago!

CHAPTER XLV.

"OLD FOLKS AT HOME." — BERTHA'S TALENTS DISCUSSED.

IT was a mild and sunny May morning. Mr. Eldon, senior, sat in his easy-chair beside an open window — an escape-valve for the white, perfumed cloud that curled upward from his parted lips, — watching, with evident satisfaction, the eagerness and activity of sprightly Edward Wilmer — Edalia's three-year-old — as he climbed up the chair-rounds, and contended for the late paper, over the tiny form of blue-eyed baby Eva, fast asleep in Mr. Redmond's arms.

Two manly arms slipped from behind Edalia over her shoulders, crossing under her chin, and a loving voice exclaimed:

"A letter from Agnes, little wife."

"Excellent! Charming!"

"What? Let's have it, Ed," and Mr. Redmond threw down his paper.

"Agnes is wedded to her early love, and comes to Carolina in September, to hibernate."

"Good! Agnes is a noble girl; and, by Jupiter! I once thought the little witch was bound to upset my air-castle."

Walter smiled.

"I owe Agnes a debt of gratitude, sir, for it was through her that I discovered the dawning of Edie's love. I permitted the current report of my betrothal to her, to mark the effect upon the genuine object of my hopes; and the full conviction of reciprocal affection well-nigh surprised me into a downright declaration."

"Capital, by Jupiter! But your pride got the ascendancy, eh? I say, hang (Ed, you scamp, get off of my toe!) all lovers' pride! But yonder comes Min, with her red cheeks and fun-loving eyes — the same old Minnie Montrose, for mischief and mirth. She sent me a snail, this morning, with a written request that I'd 'try my fortune, for it was not good that man should be alone' — the gipsy."

Minnie entered, leading Charlie, who locked arms with Ed right bravely in a rough-and-tumble exercise over the carpet.

"Have you heard the news, good people?"

"No — yes — the snail?"

"Ha! ha! he! he! — no. Colonel Henley led the *amiable* widow Tomlin to the hymenial altar at the seasonable hour of six, this morning, and they're off to Niagara on a bridal tour."

Mr. Redmond started bolt-upright.

"Thun-der! Well, there could n't a-been a better match scared up between the two oceans. He may take *his* turn at the 'grindstone,' now — eh, Wall, my boy? If she don't pepper his dish for 'im, *I'm* hanged! I'll bet on the *woman*, by Jupiter!"

"Poor Tomlin!" said Mr. Eldon, "a nobler boy never

gave promise of noble things. I'm told his wealth and extraneous influence won him his heartless bride; and his domestic life impelled him to 'fly to ills he knew not of,' rather than 'bear the ones he had.'"

"*Pre-cisely!* And there's many a poor fellow in the same fix. A termagant's tongue will lash 'most any man into kingdom come before this time; and if Henley don't run the gauntlet, and pay dear for the whistle, there never was a Franklin. Charles would a-been a second Tomlin, if he'd had a Tomlin's wife—eh, Min? All the Father Matthews, and salt in the sea, would n't a-saved 'im. Poor Tomlin! I reasoned with him on his desperate course, a few days before that grim monster *mania-a-potu* sent him to his long home; and, said he:

"'Squire Redmond, I'll stick a pin there, to everything you've said. God bless you, Squire, I know you're right; but I don't want to live, and I ain't fit to die: so I just split the difference, and go to heaven in a "horn." I say, Squire, if Job had shivered in my shoes, we never should a-*heard* of him. No two ways about *that*.'

"Well, all this won't justify him in the day of final accounts; but Tomlin was no Socrates, and died the death of an Abner."

"And moreover and furthermore," continued Minnie, adopting phraseology that smacked of the legal profession, "Peter is preparing an oration for the 'Glorious Fourth,' and sent to the city, by Charles, this morning, for Spurzheim's Philosophy, and Combe's Constitution of Man."

"Ha! ha! Well, I'm bound to hear that, by Jupiter! (Providence permitting.) I say, Walter, won't it be tall?—away up in the seventh story of human nature's habitation—a regular *aëronautic* expedition. The way he will dive into Webster, and bring up the grand progenitors, in such order as would make the old Lexicographers 'two eyes

start from their spheres,' and Ignorance cry, 'a kingdom for a horse.'

"Peter speculates largely on a small capital, and verifies the assertion of the poet to a T:— 'a little learning is a dangerous thing.' What he *has* drank of the 'Pierian Spring' won't stagnate for want of stirring. His acquirements are emphatically *pro bono publico*. I'm afraid Peter's destined to perpetual celibacy."

"Like you, Uncle Ned?—'hem! How does the snail prosper?"

"Humph! reckon it's doing pretty well, considering. I gave it a through-ticket on the ærial railway, and a deed 'signed, sealed, and delivered to itself, its heirs and assigns,' in the presence of Aunt Cora, witness to all out-doors."

"Now?"

"Fact, by Jupiter!"

"Then Ephraim *is* joined to his idols, in all conscience!"

"Point-blank; you've hit the nail plump on the head. By the way, Min, it's just seven years to-day since you and Ed consulted the oracle."

"*I* did n't."

"Sure enough. But I'll bet two chincapins, you might have found *another* bug under that old maple."

"'Cause why?"

"I saw *two* there myself." The old gentleman's eyes twinkled.

"Oh, ho!— 'thereby hangs a tale.' And I'll double the bet, that you '*saw*' the letters made in the plate too."

"Fiddlesticks! I did n't land the bug in the meal."

"Just so! but you left a 'land'-*mark* in the bottom,—say, Uncle Ned?"

"Shan't do it! I'm counsel for defendant; no State's evidence in me. Seen Ed's dressing-case, Min?"

"Never did till her wedding-day."

"W-h-e-w! so there's *one* woman who can keep a secret! Well, that's the very identical shell — the real *Simon Pure* — that Ed said *grace* over once upon a time. I had it fixed in that fashion so's to 'keep her pure mind stirred up, by way of remembrance.' Ha! ha! I say, bless the bug, by Ju —

Oo! oo! Ed, you rascal, let 'e go my hair,

'Cause, *you see*, I have n't, sir, a single bit to spare!"

The old gentleman started up, amazed at the spontaneity of his poetic genius, and stepped about the room exultingly, with Ed and Charlie swinging to his coat-tails, and little Eva's big blue eyes shining over his shoulder.

"Almost as good as Bert's, I declare," said Minnie, drawing down her mouth with affected solemnity.

"The wise man tells us 'there is a time for all things,' and I have been biding mine. Here is news for friendship's ear, with your permission," said Walter, looking up from the paper before him.

"What is that, pray?" and Minnie stretched her neck to read the title.

"The 'Williamsville Banner.'"

"You selfish thing!" said Minnie, making a grab at the paper.

"Hold on!" and Walter put the paper behind him, provokingly. "I'm to be spokesman."

"Well, hurry then, for I'm walking on eggs."

"Or a bed of hot ashes," suggested Mr. Redmond, shutting one eye and turning the other up.

"'Buds and Blossoms' is the title of a work now in press, from the facile and vigorous pen of Bertha Belmont, well known in this section as 'Bertha the Beauty.' Our talented and accomplished correspondent very justly enjoys an extensive reputation, ranking among the first authors of our country, though young in years; and we are confident her

present forthcoming volume will sustain her renown as a writer. It will be issued at an early day. Any of our readers who would like to procure a copy of this new work can be furnished, just as soon as it shall be given to the public, by leaving their names with us.

"There is a mournful, soul-touching beauty about the poetry of this lady, that appeals directly to the tenderest feelings of our nature.

"Miss Belmont is a lady of rare taste and cultivation, and, to our fancy, one of the most original, natural, and beautiful poets of the day. She has recently taken a prize from the literati of the 'Athens of America.'"

"Miss Belmont! What the deuce does that mean?" Mr. Redmond started up, and looked at Edalia for a solution of the mystery.

"I expect Bertha is divorced, uncle."

"You 'expect'! What do you *know*, I say?"

"Nothing 'fur shore,' as Aunt Cora says, but I've had a hint from Bertha relative to her anticipations — that's all."

"Why, she could n't obtain one yet; she deserted him."

"She bound me over to keep the peace; but as the deed is no doubt done, it won't be a breach of confidence to speak now. Stanhope threatened to apply for a divorce from her if she did n't return to him, and I presume he has executed the threat."

"Ha! ha! Well, that's the best deed he ever did in his life, I haven't a doubt. I did n't think it was in him to be so charitable, by Jupiter! The rascal's after another to torment to death — I'll bet all the chincapins that drop next Fall. Found the game was up with Bertha, and shuffled the cards for a new cut. I reckon Bertha don't care, eh?"

"I reckon not," said Edalia, with a queer smile about her firm mouth.

"Well now, I hope Belmont and Claude will mind their own business, and let her make her own choice next time," growled Mr. Redmond.

"She won't marry another *Yankee*, I'll warrant!" laughed Minnie, clapping her hands, and giving Mr. Redmond's hair a pull over the chair-top.

"O-u-c-h! *you* ought to marry a Yankee, to get the mischief taken out of you — you witch!"

"Stanhope applied 'on the ground of abandonment.' Does that leave Bertha free to marry again, uncle?" inquired Edalia.

"Well, no — not morally free; but the world winks at such marriages. If Stanhope marries again, then Bertha can obtain a divorce on Scriptural grounds. But I doubt if she would ever apply, even if *he* should rise to the surface again — she's too shrinking."

"Who is '*he*,' Uncle Ned? *P-le-a-s-e* tell, you old wise-acre. It won't do any hurt now; Bertha is *free*," pleaded Minnie, sweetly, putting one arm around the old man's neck.

"Oh, you may hug me much as you please, but you won't honey that secret out with sugar, by Jupiter!" said Mr. Redmond, winking at the grate.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HORACE STANHOPE'S DIVORCE. — CLAUDE "TRIES HER FAITH."

WHAT does Alonzo say?" inquired Mr. Belmont, with a half-smile about his mouth, but an anxious, doubtful expression in his eager eyes, as Bertha finished the long letter just received.

"I am *free*," answered Bertha, trying to look sober, but her eyes betrayed her.

"Has the fellow *really* got a divorce?"

"Yes, sir; Alonzo is reliable."

"Well now, I'm satisfied," said gay Claude. "I'll forgive him for all the past on the strength of this one favor. I believe I really love the rascal, now that he's out of the way. Dog if I was n't afraid I'd come home some day and find the fellow had spirited you off again. He cheated us twice, and if he'd come around the third time, I might have given him something that would put me in a close place. Now you are free from him, but not at liberty to put your neck in another noose—understand *that*. I shan't favor another suitor, you'd better believe!"

Bertha looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I know I am not free to marry again, in a moral sense; but if I were, and had a thousand suitors, it would be as vain for you, or *any one*, to attempt to influence or control me, against my will, as it was easy in the past."

"Ug! that steps on my toe!" grunted facetious Claude, wrinkling up his face; "and yours too, landlord," nodding at his pleased father. "I reckon we won't meddle with that female Hercules any more till she gets ready to slip through—hey?"

Mr. Belmont was shaking with inaudible laughter, and chewing rapidly. He gave a loud squirt from his full mouth towards the spittoon, and answered:

"I shan't put my finger into any more pies. A burnt child dreads the fire, and if her next dish ain't well cooked, it won't be my fault. She may bake her own cake next time."

"If she does, I'll make it burn, I'll bet!" said Claude, frowningly. "I shan't agree to have any more brother-in-law, if he is a *doctor*—eh, sis?"

"Oh, now I see the point," laughed Bertha. "Don't be alarmed about Zelmar, Bud; he is n't of my religious faith, or nation. He's harmless."

"No; but did n't he tell you, last night, he'd go with his wife to the church she preferred, and 'all that sort o' thing,' you know?"

"Precisely; but I don't believe all I hear nowadays."

"And then he's so handsome and highly educated — speaks a dozen languages, writes poetry, plays the piano, guitar, jews-harp, and dances like a duck in a summer shower. Love him a little — hey?"

"Ha! ha! haw!" roared Mr. Belmont.

"If Bertha ever marries again, I hope he will be a Southerner," said Mrs. Belmont, smilingly.

"Hem! that ain't saying much for me!" exclaimed the old man, looking over his shoulder at his wife, humorously.

"But it is for your daughter," laughed the loving mother.

"So the doctor's jig is up, is it?" asked persistent Claude.

"He'll never be your relative — *sure*."

"Well, now I feel better," said Claude, straightening himself up. "I like him well, as a man and friend, but I don't want any more brother-in-law around, unless —" He pursed up his mouth and looked intelligently at Bertha. "Halloo! what are you blushing about?" continued the teasing brother.

"Curiosity, I suppose. 'Unless' what?"

Claude shook his head threateningly at his father, and Mr. Belmont winked significantly back.

"Unless Harry Herbert should turn up with the tide, some day."

"Bless me! You don't really mean it?"

"He's one of the best men in the world, and starved himself three days and nights, after you married that rascal."

"I know he's good and worthy, but I don't love him." And Bertha's countenance testified to her truthfulness.

"There, I'm at sea again," said Claude, with a well-satisfied smile. "I 'only did it to try your faith,' sis. Stanhope was so terribly jealous of that man, I thought perhaps he had provoked you into loving him. They say it does have that effect sometimes; but here is one exception, I see. Herbert left town after you did, and was lost sight of. I reckon we'll not hear of him again."

And satisfied Claude went out, whistling, "I dream of all things bright."

"Bertha the Beauty" lost the look of pain that had dwelt in her brown eyes through long years, after the close of her correspondence with Horace Stanhope. She enjoyed her liberty more, because her bonds hurt her pride and self-respect. She had been tied to a dishonest, godless mortal, and felt humbled in her own eyes. She was ashamed of him, and of herself for being a part of him. She had never felt so light-hearted as when she read Alonzo's affectionate letter. She was *free* now, even from his name. The law gave her the privilege of renouncing or retaining it; and Bertha decidedly preferred the first.

Dr. Zelmar — the new suitor to whom Claude referred — colored furiously, and Bertha saw his hand tremble as he read the first poem accompanied by her changed name. He proposed immediately, and was rejected, as gently as a heart full of esteem and sympathy could refuse a favor. He returned the third time, and then removed from the city.

Bertha destroyed every letter that bore the name of her late husband, and began life anew. She had no intention of ever entering into a second alliance — she did not consider herself free to do so in the sight of heaven. She was wedded to literature, and the union was a happy one.

A year passed away after our heroine's full freedom from

Horace Stanhope. Her book had rendered her distinguished and popular. She had many stranger correspondents, both North and South; and constant calls from persons curious to behold the young authoress.

The Rev. Mr. Nettleton, of Batavia, N. Y., was one of her visitors.

Claude improved his opportunity to inquire, with off-hand carelessness:

"Did you know Horace Stanhope during his residence in your city?"

"I knew him well, by reputation, both there and elsewhere."

"I knew him in North Carolina some years ago, for a short time. How is he succeeding in life?"

"He has succeeded in rendering himself odious, by his dishonesty and dissolute habits. He left Batavia between two days to elude the law; and I'm told, by a lady who was intimate with his wife—"

"His wife?—married there, did he?" said Claude, trying to hide his delighted surprise and look indifferent.

"No; he was married when he came to Batavia."

"Ah! I heard from him during his stay there, but was not informed of his marriage. Who was his wife?"

"Miss Louisa Demming, of Rochester."

"Nice lady?" said Claude, carelessly.

"She is said to have been a very quiet and nice woman—much respected by all who were acquainted with her. But the reputation of the man was not of the best kind. He was thought to be a very *fast* liver, and not at all calculated to set the Atlantic ocean on fire."

"And what has become of the *fast* man?" inquired Claude, with facetious indifference.

"Well, he was engaged in the mercantile business in Batavia, and in process of time failed, and left the place in

a clandestine manner — ‘between two days,’ as they say of him — since which time no one there has had any knowledge of him. But there is a lady residing in Corfu who was on the most intimate terms with Stanhope’s wife, who tells me, when last heard from, he was in Cleveland, Ohio, engaged in the photograph business. But I dare say he has failed by this time — that was two months ago,” said Mr. Nettleton, with a spice of scorn and contempt for the “fast” man.

“He was *rather* fast in Carolina,” returned Claude, with a humorous expression about his eyes, — “so fast, in fact, that he outstripped his good name, and left the title of *Yankee* in very bad odor in a Southern atmosphere. He seems to be peculiarly unfortunate.”

“Yes, in every respect; for when in Batavia he was living with a second wife, though his first wife was still living, I’m told.”

“Possible!” Claude stooped to pick up something on the carpet, and the exercise reddened his cheeks. “Married twice, eh, — at his age?”

“Only a short time to the first; and if his second wife would follow the example of her ‘illustrious predecessor,’ it is thought it would be much to her advantage and honor. Perhaps she will, yet. They have been married but a few months.”

“Did you know aught of his first wife?” persisted Claude, soberly. “I feel quite interested in the rascal’s history. What was she — her name — and where from? I liked the fellow well at one time.”

“So did every one, at first acquaintance. He was gentlemanly — very — but could n’t bear scrutiny. He was a natural rogue, and had no religion to modify his misfortune. As to his first wife, I know nothing with regard to her, only that she is yet living — or was, a few months ago. Stanhope

was a clerk in New York city; from there he went to Buffalo, and engaged in the jewelry business, and — ”

“I understood he was cashier in ‘The People’s Money-Saving Bank’ of that city,” interrupted Claude, with open eyes.

“Well, I don’t know about that; hardly think it can be true, as it would, in all probability, have made a noise before he left, judging from subsequent events. He could n’t get that situation there now, if he ever held it — I predict,” returned Mr. Nettleton, dryly.

Claude Belmont, the jovial, lay flat down upon the carpet, and rolled as far under the piano as the music-stool would allow, when the hall-door closed upon Mr. Nettleton.

“Well,” said Claude, his black hair tangled over his forehead, and his good-natured mouth spread with soul-satisfaction, “I’ve got the whole book of Genesis, now; and if I don’t pity that Louisa Demming, of Rochester, dog *me*!”

“I don’t see any symptoms of it in your face, then,” returned Bertha, her brown eyes shining with suppressed mirthfulness.

“Oh, it’s interesting. I’m glad the fellow has a comforter. I’m only sorry for *her*! I hope she’ll hold him back from going too *fast*!” cried Claude, bursting into a laugh of surprising volume.

“If she does, she’ll deserve to be canonized as a saint!” said Bertha, softly. “And just to think he wrote *me*, after he married *her*! ‘I received a letter from Batavia!’”

“That’s the joke — don’t you see!” cried the young brother, rubbing his nose with his thumb. “He would have left her ‘between two days,’ and come South, if you’d given him a bit of encouragement! Wonder what Louisa would think to know that?”

“I hope she’ll never be disturbed by knowing more of his wickedness than she sees in his daily life. She has

my best wishes and sympathy, I know!" said Bertha the Beauty.

"All I marvel at is, that he did n't come, anyhow. Dog if I did n't fear I'd have the rascal to shoot before he'd quit tormenting us, and get my neck stretched for the excellent shot!" —blearing his great black eyes at her, ludicrously.

Bertha turned away, with a look of pain in her white face, which Claude fortunately construed into affection for him. *She* knew why Horace Stanhope had not molested her in her new home. It was a black story of sin and crime she had recently learned from one who was wholly ignorant of the relationship that she had once borne to the guilty man; but worthless and criminal as her late husband was, she would not expose him even to a brother, but leave him to his Maker.

"I wonder if he won't send you his photograph! He don't know that you are aware of his marriage. Alonzo says he has n't heard of him but once since he left New York city, you know; and, of course, the fellow thinks *you* are in the dark. What a thing it is, to be distinguished!" said Claude, proudly. "But for that, we should n't have seen the Rev. Nettleton. Well, if the rascal *does* send his photograph, I hope it'll represent him going it '*fast*,' 'between two days!'" added Claude, as he went out holding his nose comically.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A STARTLING LETTER. — BERTHA'S HEART-SECRET IS EXPOSED.

FIFTEEN years had gone — fifteen years! and “Bertha the Beauty” was twenty-nine. The world said *nineteen*! and Bertha smiled strangely. Her heart was young and peaceful, but the way back to her fourteenth year looked a century long to retrospection's eye; and our heroine wondered that wrinkles of age had not been creased upon her brow, during her journey over that long, weary way.

Bertha's heart felt unusually young, as she lay there on the parlor-sofa that warm May Sabbath afternoon, and looked away back through the microscope of memory, at the low brown house with the long piazza.

Would she ever see “the dear old place where first they met,” again? Bertha thought she would. Edalia and Minnie were urgent, and Bertha had promised to come, ere long.

Our heroine's pleasant dreams were broken by the hasty entrance of Claude, followed by both parents, with curiosity-lighted faces.

“See here,” said Claude, dangling a letter between finger and thumb, “I've got something for you. It comes from Percy Ormund's native city, and I have a presentiment it bears his name. Jehu! what are you coloring up so about?”

“Oh, poh! Give me the letter, you brute!”

“Well, dog *me*, if I have n't touched bottom, and come ashore at last!” said Claude, exultingly, catching his knee in both hands, and hopping about the room on one foot.

"Who is it?" inquired Mr. Belmont, as Bertha broke the seal with fluttering fingers and turned to the signature.

"Bud has guessed it, upon my word!" exclaimed Bertha, the crimson of sensibility flooding her face. ~

"I swan!" said Claude, dropping down beside her, and putting his head between hers and the letter. "I hope he's married; but I'm afraid he is not — hey?"

"How can I read through your head!" said Bertha, giving it a thump that sounded mellow and started him to his feet.

It was a long, familiar, affectionate letter, full of the fragrance of other days, and wholly rejuvenated the reader's life.

Percy Ormund was still unmarried — a bachelor of thirty-four. He had never forgotten the brown eyes of the little girl he had met under the moss-covered roof of the low brown house with the long piazza, fifteen years ago! Her memory had followed him down the years, as his had her. He had travelled five years after Mr. Belmont's negative reply to his proposition; and Time wove a thick web of darkness between them. He had learned her existence and locality through her writings, and this letter was the result.

"I wish he'd kept it to himself, then!" said Claude, with a pout, as he glanced at Bertha's bright and burning face.

"What for?"

"Because I see which way the compass points now; and the wind sets fair for both ships. He wonders that *you* are not married, and wants to know the why and wherefore. I can see through this letter — it's just as clear as mud!"

"Don't imitate somebody's example, and go too '*fast*,'" was our heroine's advice, with mirthful eyes. "But I thought you liked him?"

"So I do, more than any other man outside of home; but I don't want you to marry *any* one — that's all!"

"Just wait till I have a chance to 'slip through'!" exclaimed Bertha, trying to hide her fluttering heart under a gay mask.

"Oh, I see which way that road leads!" said Claude, with a half smiling grunt, as he looked at his sister's red cheeks, and twisted his mouth at his amused father;—"straight down fifteen years, and breaks off in the low brown house with the long piazza—hum!"

"And if you'd let me alone, those fifteen years might not lie so dark between," she answered, mournfully.

"Heigho! You'll own up, then? Clear beat, and full surrender, eh?"

"I shan't make any confession without a priest," said Bertha, with a face that spoke louder than language.

Claude frowned, and winked at his father.

"Well, hang me, if I suspected the boy's intention, or anybody else's feelings, or I would have taken the youngster back, and had the business fixed right! He was a fine young fellow—I liked him. Why the deuce didn't you speak up for the boy?" said Mr. Belmont, with twinkling eyes.

"*Me!*" exclaimed Bertha, springing to her feet, spasmodically. She was gone from their presence right suddenly.

"Well, that I call romance in real life," said Mr. Belmont, looking very much pleased, as he ran his fingers through his hair; "I see how the land lies with her—she can't hide it!"

"That's clear as spring water," returned Claude, "and nobody ever suspected her! And now, after all she has refused, she'll take him when he offers, and our home will be a tripod again! I like the man well, but I don't relish the thought of his stealing sister away. I know what home is without her!" and exercised Claude kicked the carpet with his heel as he walked the floor.

"Well, I shan't say a word about it, *pro* or *con*," responded the old man, spitting lustily through the window, and blackening the gravel in the yard-walk; "and I advise you to keep out of another scrape. Bertha's sensible enough to choose for herself, and strong enough to walk without support. I guess they'll fix it right to suit all hands; and it's no use to flinch before the fire gets hot. I say, let 'em alone. Such constancy merits reward."

"I don't believe she'll be justifiable by law in marrying again in her present situation," exclaimed Claude, catching at this straw. "I know nothing about the law of divorce here, but under the law of New York *he* is illegally married; I know that. And though *sis* is free from his lawful power, I don't see how she can marry legally. I hope she's hemmed in, by George!" ejaculated Claude, drawing up one foot, and keeping it suspended in the air a moment, under the influence of this fresh hope.

"I'd rather she'd wed Percy than any other man, if he would n't take her away," said the loving mother.

"That's it! There's where the shoe pinches, don't you see? I like the man well enough to have him for a brother; and if he'll make a bargain to suit me, I won't say another word in opposition: for if he's the same Percy I knew fifteen years ago, he'll stick to his bargain. Well, we'll let matters work quietly a while, and see how the new suit fits, before we grumble at the pattern, that's all."

And so it was decided.

When Bertha escaped from the parlor, like a frightened bird, she sprang up the stairs and into her quiet chamber, turning the bolt after her. She was safe now from all prying eyes and teasing tongues, and a broad smile of heart-sunshine streamed from the fair face that shone from the mirror-surface, as she stopped mechanically before it—such a smile as had never lighted up that lovely face before in

all the past. Bertha thought she saw some beauty in that beaming countenance now; and, indeed, the whole earth seemed full of beauty and bloom to our happy-hearted heroine.

After all the black clouds and beating storms that had blighted her young life, she had come forth from the gloomy shadows of fate and stood in the bright sunshine of fortune. Weeping she had endured for a night—a long night of fifteen weary years!—but joy had come in the morning of a new and glorious hope.

She felt confident of the design of Percy Ormund; it was a felt fact without tangible words. She knew she was loved by the only heart she had ever cared to win, and her restless spirit—that had wandered the weary way of life tired and lone so long—folded up its pilgrim feet and sank down to rest at last, in a sweet and sun-bright home.

And yet not quite at rest, for the awaking from grief to gladness was so sudden and surprising, that the sweet shock quivered along the delicate wires of her frail being, and sent a telegram to the sighing soul, of “Hope resurrected,” that burdened it a while with great joy!

She could not sit quietly, and her tiny feet wandered over the carpet, while her thoughts ran wild through the wilderness of departed days. Bertha did not look forward—she did not reach after the To-Come; the rivulet of her dreams ran along the wayside of the past, and washed the dust of years from the green things that were gone.

She saw a Providence in all that had bruised and blighted in the long weary journey of her fate-shadowed life.

But for her sufferings, she might not have turned from the vanities of the world, and been “saved by grace;” she might have gone down a blossom-bordered way without turning her worldly eyes to the stars, and fallen into the dark waves of Jordan, with no sustaining hand to guide her fearlessly through.

But for her matrimonial misfortunes, she would not have "learned in suffering what she taught in song"; and but for her songs, she would not have been heard and found by Percy Ormund, in all human probability.

Bertha said softly, "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." She knelt down at the bedside, and asked Him who had brought her through the years "out of great tribulation," to forgive her past repinings and ingratitude, and strengthen her heart to walk without fainting through all the future.

Ah, Bertha did not see the black wings that brooded over that future, or her glad and grateful soul would have sunk down fainting then! She did not look through the golden light of the present, and see the dark-browed Fate that had followed her along the path of the by-gone, frowning just beyond the shining borders of a short To-day.

"Beloved, think it not strange the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you," was not in all the thoughts of our happy-hearted heroine.

Bertha fancied the "fiery trial" was held in the past, and the great Arbiter of human destiny had given her a full discharge from the further persecutions of grim-faced Fate.

Percy Ormund's design in addressing our heroine by letter, after the lapse of fifteen years, was soon made manifest by frequent communications and unequivocal words.

Bertha told him all, — her past history and present situation, — foreseeing his purpose in renewing the friendship of early youth; and ere the glorious summer was ended, and the gold and crimson of autumn came, "Bertha the Beauty" was the betrothed bride of her first and only love.

Bluer looked the blue skies, and greener glittered the green earth to the beaming eyes of our beautiful heroine, as the bright days glided by, festooned with flowers from the

gay garden of a newly-blooming heart, watered with the cool dew of reciprocal love.

But ere the autumn was ended, the black wings of her Fate were stretched wide above her hapless head, and the great light that had glowed in her face a little while, dropped silently away into sombre shadows.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES. — CLAUDE BELMONT'S CONFESSION.

I SAY, sis, how does the suit progress?" said gay Claude, one day, after secretly watching Bertha's sober face.

"Finely," she said, with a rising blush.

"Engaged yet, eh?"

"Oh yes," — with a sickly smile.

"Hey?" Claude sprang up spontaneously, but sat down immediately, trying to look indifferent and cool. "When is Percy coming up?"

"Next spring."

"Well, that's a decent length of time. I was fearful he'd hurry matters. Do you know it will be necessary for you to obtain a divorce before you can legally marry?"

"I do, *now*."

"How did you find it out, you close head?"

"From my pastor."

"You did? Been consulting him? — he's no lawyer."

"No; but he's something better; and, besides, he has learned the law on that point."

"Ahem!" Claude lay back and whistled a while, with both hands grasping his coat-collar, and an indefinable

glitter in his dark eyes. "You'll have to apply immediately, to be ready by spring — takes some time to settle such business."

He glanced at her serious face sideways.

"*I shall never marry while Horace Stanhope lives*, Bud," she said, solemnly.

"Hey?" His chair came forward with a force that made the floor ring, and his eyes widened and snapped wonderfully. "What the deuce is up now? Why do you back out?"

"It is written, 'She that putteth away her husband, and marrieth again,' violates the seventh commandment. 'The wife is bound by the law so long as her husband liveth,' and not *until she is divorced*. Also, 'Let not the wife depart from her husband; but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried.' Is not that too plain to be misunderstood by any one who *desires* to do right?"

"Hallelujah!" shouted Claude, throwing his head back and his heels up. "That's the best sermon I ever heard in my life! Any more of the same sort, sis? I want you pinned tight in a scriptural sheet, so 's to leave no loop-hole for conscience to creep out at a pinch — hey?"

"You selfish thing!" said Bertha, smiling in spite of herself; "just wait till you're placed in my position, and then you'll learn sympathy."

"Hurt you much?" laughed Claude, dipping down, and diving into her eyes. "So you won't apply next court?"

"*Never!*"

"Does Percy know it?"

"Percy thinks it's *right*."

"Oh, ho! And if he had n't, he might have convinced you — hey?"

"If he had n't, it would not have been wrong."

"Jiminy! is that your faith? How does he take it?"

"Like St. Peter at the cross — as a good Christian bears a burden."

"Bravo! Well, that's just the opinion I had formed of the man, and I've been wondering how the matter would end, though I kept mum. I know most people would have cleared that fence at one bound; but I thought a true Christian's garment would be pretty apt to get hitched on the upper rail. I know it's all right and fair, as the world goes, — thousands have done the deed, from the beginning of the world till now, — but whoever examines the root of the matter from an earnest desire to walk in the 'straight and narrow way,' must see it is morally wrong and socially corrupt. In my opinion, if such marriages were prohibited by law, there would be fewer divorces in the land. 'So long as you both shall live' — to which one assents at the bridal altar — cannot be expunged by a human hand; it's engraved on the tablet of eternity. I wouldn't wed in your situation, or marry a divorced wife, however beautiful and good and dear she might be; but I'd wait for her till the last bell sounded for prayers, if I loved her as I think somebody does you, from the number of letters that pass! I should think that fellow would find something else to do, in his position, besides courting every day, at such a distance!" said Claude, peeping roguishly under at Bertha's blooming face.

"Percy will wait," she said, softly.

"And you will wait — eh?"

"I will."

"And if that rascal never dies?" he suggested.

"I am not waiting for him to die," she said, hastily, with a little shiver. "I hope he will live until he's prepared for a brighter and better world than this."

"You wish him a long life, then? Dog if I don't believe he'll be the last man on this terrestrial sphere, if the

Lord grants him that lease! I'm afraid his conscience is seared; he's married illegally!"

"I know that now; but I was not aware of the fact when —"

"When what?" queried Claude, watching her crimsoning cheek at right-angles.

"When I entered into a second engagement."

"You might prosecute the rascal for bigamy," said Claude, with twinkling eyes.

"No, no!" exclaimed our heroine, in a flutter. "*I am not his wife!*"

"Oh, ho! that hurts, does it? No, thank the Lord, he's got no right to you, sis; but you could get the fellow into trouble, if you wished."

"I shan't trouble him, then,—he's safe, so far as *I'm* concerned."

"Well, what are you waiting for, if you don't want the fellow to die?"

"God's will, and a happier world!" said Bertha, bravely, looking firmly into his sober eyes. "I never thought seriously on this subject, until Percy waked me from dreaming," she continued, smiling faintly, "and —"

"And if Percy should insist now, you'd get a divorce, hey?"

"*Never!* I thought I was wholly free, and the example of thousands, including ministers of the gospel, justified me in marrying again. I never analyzed the flower and found it a poisonous plant. I always found it a great convenience in softening refusals to others, to hint at my position, and decline to be convinced by argument. I was *willing* to be sceptical then, but now it hurts!"

"Where at?" inquired Claude, peeping under playfully.

"Here!" said Bertha, tapping one small finger quickly over her heart, and coloring deeply.

An expression of pain dwelt in the brother's dark eyes, a moment; then he said, with apparent lightness:

"Oh, it'll all come right, sis; it won't last long; no cause for feeling troubled. Percy is safe, and you —"

"It is n't that!" she interrupted. "I felt *free* before, but now I feel smothered, caged. I seem to have a great net over me that I can't shake off." And Bertha wriggled her slender shoulders impulsively, with a contracted brow.

"I can shake it off mighty easy, I'll bet!" said Claude, catching her around the waist and tossing her towards the ceiling several times.

"Gone, ain't it, hey?" he asked, mischievously, as he set her down.

"No, and never will be by human agency! Oh, if you had n't urged me!" she cried, piteously, dropping her face in her hands, and bursting into irrepressible tears.

Claude Belmont, the jovial, was on his knees, with his arms around her, in an instant.

"I'm sorry, sis! The Lord knows I wish I had n't! I wished it long ago, for that matter! And that's why I kept mum now. I was n't going to get my fingers burnt again, 'I swan'!" said Claude, trying to cheer her up, with affected gayety.

"If you did n't care about it," continued Claude, "'t would suit me to a notch! for just as like as not, Percy would n't consent to let you live here; and then —"

"Yes, he would."

"Did he say as much?"

"Yes. It was all settled. He would have consulted my feelings."

"Bless him! If he said so, he'd *do* it. I always liked the man, but I'd like it a little better if you loved *me* the best. You see I'm a bit jealous — got greenish eyes *too* — hey?"

"You selfish fellow, you know I love you, like all the world!"

"Over the left, you know! Want to run off with that scamp, and leave me to eat dirt, when he don't love you *half* as well as I do!" said Claude, turning up his nose, and stretching his mouth and eyes ludicrously.

Bertha laughed irresistibly, with great tears glittering in her eyes.

"Here I am, an old bach of twenty-seven, and don't care a snap for the girls, 'or any other man,' just because I've got a naughty little sis that I like better!" said Claude, kissing both wet eyes and small mouth with loud smacks; "and I shan't marry either, so long as that same little sis is out of other fellows' claws, and she don't care enough for me to keep from feeling hurt because she can't run off without breaking the Decalogue all to smash! There — there; don't cry any more!" he said, soothingly, as Bertha's lips trembled again. "Percy will be faithful, I know, and if it's the Lord's will you're waiting for, I think He'll reward you after a while. And if that rascal never dies —"

"There's 'light *beyond* the clouds,'" said Bertha, bravely.

"Yes; and I believe you've got grace enough in this little body, not to break your heart for what Providence decrees. I should collapse immediately, to see you moping around in 'a green and yellow melancholy.' And then you've got somebody to love besides *me*, you know," said Claude, squeezing her around the waist with both arms; "and goodness knows, you've had more than your share of affection in this world already. You won't feel hurt about it any more? — keep a stiff upper lip, and just wait patiently, and see what the will of the Lord is — hey?"

"I will — I *will*!" said Bertha, gulping down something that went hard, and kissing his loving mouth through his moustache, with her arms clinging around his neck.

"Bravo! I thought you'd come out all right! I know something about the mechanism of this little machine," tapping her shoulder lightly; "mighty small and frail to look at, but strong as fury when it runs against a snag—I swan!" said Claude, bounding up, and going out with a gay whistle.

Claude Belmont bore the reputation of being "the most devoted brother the sun ever shone on;" and the world was right. Many a bright eye had vainly tried to wing an arrow to his heart; but Claude was invulnerable. And yet the archers still bent their bows. Would he ever be struck? Bertha wondered, and hoped he would not, until after her engagement to Percy Ormund. Now the secret was betrayed, and Bertha cried over it when Claude could not see the tears.

And Claude Belmont, the jovial, went up to his room, whistling; but when there, the gay mask fell off, and he wept secret drops of sympathy for his sister's sufferings. He knew how she was pained by her strong but ineffectual efforts to conceal her feelings; and the brother's loving heart grieved for her in secret, and ran over with seeming sunshine, when Bertha was by to catch the beams!

Percy Ormund did not "come up next spring," as Bertha had said, for the hoarse thunder of WAR was rumbling fearfully through the land, and Percy was captain of a company of brave volunteers preparing for the emergency.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"THE WAR FOR THE UNION." — BERTHA FEARS FOR
CLAUDE.

IT was a terrible day when the first "invader of the sacred soil" fell, and Colonel Ellsworth lay dead beneath the Confederate flag, at the Marshall House, and Jackson, his destroyer, fell, shot and brutally mangled by the furious and savage Zouaves.

Bertha sprang from her couch of dreams — awakened by the unusual sound without — and peered through the blinds.

What a scene! Hundreds of foreign-looking "boys in blue," with bayonets glittering in the early May morning light, — a white flag shivering on a short staff, — innumerable black faces, with wide mouths stretched from ear to ear, and white eyes dancing with gladness all around, and the Star-spangled Banner waving over all, with the kettle-drum and fife racking the beaten air.

Bertha looked at the glittering steel, and thought, with a shiver, "Percy may meet them!"

She made a hasty toilet, and descended to the hall.

"Be jabers, an' they won't hurt ye — you needn't be afraid, young leddy," said Paddy, eying our heroine as she stood upon the street-step and looked after the marching soldiers.

Bertha judged her countenance had awakened the sympathy of the kind-hearted Irishman who looked at her so pityingly and essayed to comfort the little stranger, and she smiled faintly.

"Be me sowl, an' there ain't no danger in 'em — faith, an' it's meself that says it — arrah!" said Pat, his admiring eyes devouring her fair face, with the great shadow over it.

"Thank you; I'm not afraid," said Bertha, as she turned away. "For *myself*," she added, as she closed the hall-door behind her; "but, oh, for him! for *him*!"

But our heroine was terribly afraid for more than Percy Ormund before the shades of night closed around; for rumor ran that the desperate Zouaves would ransack and burn the town ere the light of another morning, in revenge for their colonel's death. But the morning dawned, after a long, weary night, and "one woe was past" for our heroine, and the town at large.

But one fear followed fast upon the heels of a departed one during that long, struggling, and bloody period, "the War for the Union," and Bertha said to Claude one day:

"Won't you have to go, now that we are within the lines?"

"Reckon not," caressing his upper lip; "shan't till I'm forced—certing-le! I'm a non-combatant under the circumstances. Nobody left to take care of *you*—don't you see? I was always opposed to secession—I see the end from the beginning—and I have n't a doubt but the leaders will acknowledge their folly when the war is over, if they have any breath left; I'll confess it for them in advance, and take the responsibility. But I shan't fight them for it, if I know myself, and I think I do, that deep. Pretty-looking fellow I should be to pop Percy over!" said Claude, stretching his eyes soberly.

"Oh, don't, please!"

"Don't please? Well, that's what I like to do; but I won't, if you say so. No, no; blood is thicker than water, and friendship something more than a name; and I shan't volunteer to fight my own people, if I do think and know they are wrong—foolishly wrong, for they are destroying themselves, like Ephraim. They'll see it after a while, when it's too late, and perceive how vain their hopes now are of foreign aid. England and France won't interfere

with our domestic difficulty, unless they can come in and capture the whole household—depend upon that—and their aid is the sole dependence of the South. John Bull and *Monsieur Francais* are not very disinterested animals, and unless they can pick the golden fleece, they'll keep their hands off, I'll bet ye! If the North and South will just turn in and swallow each other, then old Johnny and Frog-eater will pounce down and make our eagle squeal—be jabbers!" said Claude, rubbing his head as though he'd got a blow. "I'm a Union man because I love the South, and I'd be shot down before I'd fire a gun at my old home. But if foreign powers interfere with old Uncle Sam, I would n't mind giving 'em a dig!" added Claude, looking daggers at a foreign foe and turning up his nose at Bertha.

"And if you went, I'd go too—that's certain."

"Put on jacket and cap, and shoulder your musket—hey?" inquired the young man, dropping down on the carpet, and laying his head back upon her arm.

"I'd follow as hospital nurse, like those women who go draggling through the mud after every regiment that comes in—for it rains whenever there's a military movement)—poor things!"

"Then what a lucky hap it was that you and Percy did n't get spliced last spring; for the rebel talked square up for Southern independence, in that kiss-me-quick letter he smuggled through the lines; and while there's a Federal bayonet in the field, and he's afloat, that Confederate captain of volunteers will fight—ha! ha! Should n't wonder a bit if the 'Grayback' climbed clear up the ladder of distinction before the war ends, and comes bobbing around here after a while as General Ormund, C. S. A.—whew!" said Claude, pulling her face down to his with both hands.

"If he lives he'll distinguish himself, no doubt," replied Bertha, softly.

"Oh, he'll live through it all, I feel it in my bones — may get scratched just enough to be brought up to the hospital here for you to nurse — going to look for him after every big battle — hey?"

"I reckon I'll find him, if he's brought here; or any other old-time friend."

"Horace, mayhap!" he suggested, with a twinkle of his upturned eyes.

Bertha laughed outright; the idea was so original and preposterous. Horace Stanhope go to the war! It was too much for her to think of without a risible eruption.

"Seems to me," he said, holding his mouth with finger and thumb, "you have n't a very exalted opinion of that fellow's bravery and patriotism. Like as not he'll outstrip Kelley and McClelland, and lead the United States forces 'on to Richmond' yet! Who knows?" said Claude, scrambling up from the floor, and disappearing, with both hands holding his sides.

The brother's object was accomplished; he had driven the shadows from her face for the time.

CHAPTER L.

AFTER THE BATTLE.—UNDER-GROUND MAIL.

THAT awful twenty-first of July, 1861.

Bertha heard the heavy cannon booming all through that solemn Sabbath from the distant battle-field of Bull Run, and her aching heart quivered at every sound.

"Manassas is captured — the rebels are whipped — their stronghold is taken by the Yankees!" was bruited abroad as the night closed in.

What a weight the human heart can bear, and not be broken beneath the mighty burden!

Bertha lay and tossed to and fro, now starting from a frightful dream when tired nature sank away through sheer weariness; and now pressing her aching eyes deep down in the pillow, as a mental vision arose before them until the morning light. And then she looked forth upon a scene that beggars all description.

Dirty, ragged, shoeless, hatless, tangle-haired, swearing, hungry-looking Union soldiers, without arms, lined the side-walks as far as the eye could reach from her chamber-window — their bare feet submerged in the full gutters, and a dismal rain beating piteously upon their much-abused uniforms. Some were nibbling "hard tac," with occasional draughts from a suspicious-looking canteen; others consigned McDowell to uncomfortably hot quarters for a "traitor;" and a large number were stretched at full length, coiled into semicircles, or flat of their backs, with knees and noses upturned towards the watery clouds, upon the muddy pavement.

Bertha had never witnessed such a scene before, and her eyes dilated with astonishment. Had those miserable-looking "Yanks" whipped the "Rebs," and taken possession of their stronghold? she wondered. If they had, our heroine thought "one more such victory, and the Government was ruined!" They certainly had been "saved as by fire"; and Bertha thought their raiment bore strong evidence of having been much injured by *wood*!

"What does this mean?" asked Bertha, bounding half dressed into the breakfast-room, with eyes round and rolling.

"Could n't find a good place to sleep at Manassas, and the Rebs poisoned the water!" said Claude, rubbing the side of his nose soberly.

"Percy's kind heart could n't accommodate 'em with

lodgings fit for soldiers, and sent 'em back to town for comfortable quarters. Beauregard's and Johnson's families filled all the vacancies in 'Cousin Sallie's' hotel, and the old lady could n't take in strangers. What are you blinking about?" asked Claude, puckering up his mouth as though for a whistle.

"Why, I thought the Union had broken the back-bone of the Rebellion yesterday, and it would n't ever be able to stand alone again!"

"So did 'we, us, and company'; but it turned out to be only a *spare* rib; and Jo Johnson, the rascal, came up in the nick of time and splintered it, and doctored the patient until it got strong enough to engage in a foot-race, with its old master Jeff looking on for amusement. But the 'gray-backs' could n't catch the 'blue boys,'—they beat the Rebs at *that* game. They left 'em in the lurch and got back home safe and sound, a great deal lighter than they left," said Claude, nodding his head exultingly at Bertha, over the "Yankee trick" played on the Rebs by the "blue boys."

"Where are you going?—breakfast is ready!" said Claude, looking after her with a long face and laughable eyes, as Bertha went out with one hand over her mouth and the other pulling at her curls.

Mrs. Belmont and Bertha stood at the window, looking out upon the wild and awful scene.

Squads of soldiers, with filthy garments and tattered banners,—careworn women with dirty babies, eating beef and crackers on the side-walk with men who had lost all the seeming of soldiers, saving the language,—a few scattering muskets, leaning against trees, looking as though they had "fought their last battle,"—and the restless rain drizzling over all.

"Jewilikins! ain't she a beauty?" said a wide-eyed sol-

dier, looking back over his shoulder at Bertha, who had not before observed him.

"Beats creation all to flinders!" exclaimed his brother in arms, kissing his hand towards the window that framed the fair face.

Bertha closed the shutters.

"Tell yeou what, old lady," cried a boy in blue to a female of African descent on the opposite side of the street, "we Yanks got licked like blazes this bout — don't deny it. D—— my eyes, if them Rebs don't fight like h——! whoop! Had a big fight and a long slide, and no whiskey tew lean on —ke-oo! Oh, good Goddle-mity, *a-i-n-t* I glad I'm a-livin' now!"

And the brave soldier lifted one foot clear of the pavement, and bent so far backward, in hug-himself delight for being still in the flesh after his "long slide" from a "big fight," that Bertha listened to hear his head bump upon the law of gravitation!

But the Union ship, well laden with corn and rye, uprighted with a shiver and jerk, and dived forward with a broad leaning towards both sides of the street, as it scudded under bare poles.

"There's patriotism for you," said Bertha, shutting her mouth tight and turning to her mother.

"How it reels!" replied Mrs. Belmont, looking after the bold soldier just from the battle, with elevated eyebrows and slightly parted lips.

"I reckon he did n't do much fighting," said our heroine, soberly.

"But he's good on a 'long slide,'" laughed the mother, as the Federal craft went down on the causeway under the pressure of too much top-sail and mucilaginous under-current.

"Say, sis, Percy's coming in to-night," cried Claude, popping his head into the parlor, with rueful visage.

"What's the rumor now?"

"Why, McDowell and his whole army has skedaddled, and the Confeds are after Uncle Sam's head, and the Yankees say Jeff Davis may play foot-ball with it to-morrow, if he follows up his victory. The soldiers are marching out to defend the town to the best of their demoralized ability, and there's g-r-e-a-t excitement in the city," said Claude, blaring his great black eyes at Bertha.

"I reckon he won't stay long if he comes now," she returned, dryly.

"Should n't wonder. Those big dogs of war down there on the Potomac will bark loud if that 'glorious Beauregard' wakes 'em from their slumber; and the mischief of it is they won't mind where they bite. Just as like as not they'll give *us* the hydrophobia before that Captain Ormund can take their heads off and make 'em 'die in Dixie!'" said Claude, dropping down at full length upon the sofa, and shutting his eyes tight, with a loud snore. "Moreover," he continued, waking up suddenly, "the general in command here is calling upon the Union citizens to stand to arms and assist the soldiers in keeping the Rebels back. I reckon I'll have to go and take a pop at Percy at last," with a long face and lonesome groan. "What are you laughing about?" to Bertha, in evident surprise.

"You won't have the privilege of popping at Percy to-night, or ever, near the limits of this corporation."

"How do you know—hey?" said Claude, rising upon his elbow, and staring at her with full eyes.

"The Confederacy won't reach the capital through this city, if it ever does," returned our heroine, mysteriously.

"I want tew.know! dew tell!" said Claude, putting up his mouth and nose as though he snuffed a strange scent from afar. "Heard from the captain since the battle?"

Bertha's curly head dipped and her brown eyes danced.

"Jehu! right side up with care, eh?"

"Not a scratch; only three bullets through his cap and a sabre-cut across his coat-sleeve," answered our heroine, with a shiver.

"Jiminy! Pretty close quarters for edged tools! How the deuce did that letter come?"

"Underground mail," said Bertha, laying one finger on her lip and looking wonders at the Union brother.

"I won't tell — 'spit it out!'" said Claude, peeping intelligently into her bright face.

"A soldier in Federal uniform brought it."

"*Jim-i-ny!* traitor! deserter! — off with his head, Buckingham!" And Claude flourished his arm, as though acting upon the suggestion, with humorous eyes.

"But the man was a Southern soldier," laughed Bertha, "and only came in to see his friends. He asked me for a drink of water, and when the glass came back it held this letter," holding it up, with a musical ring from her red mouth. "He's going back in a few days, and take an answer to this — *Deo volante!*"

"How the mischief did he manage it?"

"Easy enough! Donned a dead soldier's uniform; Percy sent him on horseback to the lines. Then he was one of the Union stragglers — lost all but his life — and got in here terribly tired with running through the woods from desperate Rebels, you know!" And Bertha laid her head back upon the cushion, and half screamed with delight at the mail-carrier's cunning.

"Jerusalem!" said Claude, falling back on the sofa and hiding his face a moment, while his whole form shook. "Maybe he'll get back safe," suggested Claude, looking up with a remarkably sober face.

"Maybe he will, and not walk all the way either."

"I reckon he won't be missed from his regiment here when

he leaves with the mail," added Claude, bursting into an irresistible horse-laugh. "Well, that captain beats me; but it's none of my business," said Claude, going off with a shrug of the shoulders and stepping high at each stride.

CHAPTER LI.

OLD BROADBRIM ENTERS THE LINES.

A YEAR passed away, blood-stained and sunless, and the hope of a speedy termination of our national troubles grew faint and fainter; the clouds of war grew more dense and the earth more darkened.

Bertha's search for some old-time, familiar face, through the hospitals after every "big battle," had thus far been unsuccessful. She changed her mind relative to being a "hospital nurse" before the close of that year. Such scenes as she had witnessed in passing through the crowds of sick and wounded, gave her entirely new ideas of, and feelings for, the vocation.

Bertha found a woman was sadly out of her sphere where men and modesty were strangers to each other. She drew her thick veil over her hot face, and hurried through, shutting her eyes sometimes to avoid a second view of some sickening scene.

The September sun had not reached its meridian when a one-horse cart, well laden with wood, was observed by the guard at West End slowly approaching from the Theological Seminary.

The appearance of the driver was interesting in the ex-

treme. Union Brassbuttons eyed him with evident satisfaction.

He was very tall, and sat upon the cart-front with both big boots as far apart as they could conveniently get. His pants, of "Virginia mixed," were rolled to the knees, and a broad-brimmed hat slouched over long grizzly locks, with a red bandanna tied under the chin, indicating toothache or neuralgia. He swung his whip lazily, as he came on at a snail's gallop, and whistled loudly, "The Red, White, and Blue."

"Halt!"

Woodman drew up short, and smoothed out his mouth.

"I comed a purpose. What'll ye have?" inquired Broadbrim.

"Got ary papergram aboard o' your trousers?" said guard.

"Nary time," diving his hands deep down in his pockets, and bringing up something that looked suspicious; "but I've got some nasty Confederate scrip I've been peddlin' off to the Union boys as curiosities, you know. Have some? Only ten cent on the dollar, you know."

"Don't care 'f I dew. How much you got o' the trash?"

"Le' me see; one, two, three"—and woodman counted up to thirty. "Got thirty o' the stuff. Take 'em for the rest o' the boys, you know. They'll want 'em to speck'late on, you know."

"Wall, yas—guess as how I will, 'you know,'" said Yank, winking significantly. "Here's three good dollars for the nasty stuff, jest out o' Uncle Sam's mint. Makes your mouth water—say, yeou?"

"All right, you know. Git up here, Bose—got to sell out 'fore dark, and git a pass back, you know?"

"Hold on there; yeou hain't got no contrabands and things aboard o' your pile—love-letters and sich—stowed into knot-holes, and so on, be yeou?"

"Not's I knows on — haw! haw! You kin look, you know, and if you ketch a weazel asleep, you kin jest tell me, you know."

"Guess I'll be pooty apt tew dew that same, you know!" said Yank, setting his head on one side and putting the end of his thumb to the tip of his red nose. "Bound to be pooty bright-eyed these times; an', spite of all, news sneaks through the lines — the d——l knows how! Them secesh women down there" — pointing to the city eastward — "knows all about things on t' other side; an' how they git at it, old Abe's gov'ment carn't find eout. Meanest secesh hole in creation — that's so!"

"They won't git no letters this load, you know; I don't tote contrabanders to seceshers, nary time, you know."

"He-aw! he-aw! he-aw!" roared Yank, bending double with the force of sound; "I heerd tell o' that same 'tote' up in Yankee-land, but I never seen it done afore. Say, yeou, hain't got no 'heap' o' letters to 'tote' round — hey?"

"Reckon not, you know — haw! haw!"

"I'll jest look under your broadbrim and handkercher, ef you've no objection, 'you know.'"

"Sartinly; but look fast, 'cause I've got the nuralergy in the face, and mought ketch cold, you know. 'Sides that, I've got to git a pass from Mars Provost-Marshal 'fore long, or stay in town over night, you know. We southside fellows used to gin them things to niggers, and now they gin 'em to us, you know."

"Hey? yeou d—— Rebel! Niggers be we?" and guard levelled his musket at Broadbrim.

"Don't shoot! I'll come down!" said woodman, squatting behind the cart, and peeping under with a broad grin. "You would n't hurt an old fellow like me, you know?"

"How do I know?" snickered Yank, dropping his gun, and blowing his nose with his fingers. "Yeou ain't no spy,

pokin' in here after no good, be yeou?—jest eout o' the Rebel army, in Quaker clothes, tew cheat a feller, like that d—— Moseby, drivin' in here tew market with chickens to sell?"

"Did n't do it, did he?" asked woodman, with saucer-like eyes.

"Wall, yas—the d—— rascal done that same, they say; and the secesh women hid him till he could creep eout! Ought tew have a rope round their necks, every d—— b—— of 'em! If 't were n't for them we should n't 'a' had such a hard pull at Chantilla, tew my mind!"

"Lost your man down there, did n't ye?"

"Yas; old Kearney knocked under; and he'll be missed tew. Bravest man that ever lost a arm, tew my mind."

"I reckon, you know, he went out a-cussin', did n't he?"

"Like 's not. He was able tew dew it — that 's so!"

"Say he could cuss clean through, and come out on t' other side in a blue streak, you know! Didn't have to pay for cussin' 'fore that last fight o' his'n down at Chantilly; but I reckon it costs him dear now, with back interest, you know!"

"You hain't got nuthin' further for me to do, have ye? 'cause it's time, you know, to be movin' towards Mars Provoste's."

"Wall, yeou can move on neow, I guess. Good-day, old Broadbrim!"

"Good-bye, too! much obleeged to ye, Mars Fed!" said woodman, ducking his head over the wood-pile, and driving on at a brisk trot.

As the old Broadbrim went down the street, whistling the "Star-spangled Banner" whenever a Union soldier could hear, his blue eyes flew from door to door in evident search of something.

Suddenly he tightened the reins, and called out to Mr. Belmont, standing on the step:

"Want any wood to-day, you know?"

"Well, I don't know — how much for it?"

"Seventy-five cents — first-rate wood, you know."

"Pretty cheap — guess I'll take it at that rate."

"Thought that 'd fetch ye, you know. You see it's gittin' late, an' I've got other fish to fry 'fore I git out'n here. Where'll ye have it dumped down?"

"Here, Ben," (to the servant,) "show that man where to put that wood.

"I'll come round and settle for it."

Mr. Belmont went out to the alley, where Broadbrim had "dumped down" the load.

"Give a fellow a drink o' water?" asked woodman.

"Certainly. I'll send it out."

"Never mind; I'll go git it, if you've no objection."

"Pleasant place, this," — smiled old Broadbrim, sinking down upon the piazza-floor, after refreshing himself with a glass of Cameron run; "reckon, I rest a bit."

"Take this easy-chair," said Bertha, drawing it out of the hall; "you look tired."

Woodman gave a quick turn, and stamped his foot upon the floor at the sound of her voice.

"Thank you, Miss; I'll take it 'cause you say so; but I ain't tired now."

"Live far out?" inquired Mr. Belmont, as Claude came up.

"Pretty well down — close on to Manassy."

"Good times out there, plenty to eat, and no stealing?" asked Claude.

"Haw! haw! You need n't want to try it! 'Bout as lean as Pharaoh's kine — first the Rebels, and then the Yanks; and between the two we're about cleaned out."

"The *Southerners* did n't trouble you, I reckon," said Bertha, smiling.

"Why not, Miss?" eying her under his broadbrim.

"Because Southerners don't steal from their friends; but the Yankees trust nobody for loyalty down here, and take from all alike!"

"That's the blessed truth, child! I know something about that."

"Rebel, eh?" said Mr. Belmont, with a half-frown.

"I'm a Southern man by birth; and I never saw a man born in the South that had n't real feeling for his own people, however much he might think they had erred," returned woodman, forgetting apparently, in his warmth, his former style of expression.

His hearers exchanged intelligent glances.

"You were born in the South, I reckon?" turning to Bertha.

"Oh, yes, thank fortune! away down in North Carolina."

"Grandest little copperhead within the Federal lines!—ought to be sent to the Old Capitol!" laughed Mr. Belmont.

"All are copperheads, nowadays, who don't want the South sunk; no matter if they are faithful to the old flag, and deplore secession. I reckon *you* were n't born this side of Mason and Dixon's," to Mr. Belmont.

"No, I'm a Northern man, and true blue for the Union."

"Butler and Co.!" said Broadbrim, catching his under lip with his upper teeth tightly.

"Well, I never quarrel with a man for differing from me in sentiment; but I wish them to concede the same right to me; and not raise the hue and cry of 'traitor,' 'rebel,' and 'copperhead,' because a Southerner don't buy rope to hang his own people. I believe there are as good and true Unionists in the South as you could find anywhere North; but they get no credit for it, if they have any sympathy for their struggling brothers. I reckon this little girl is Union at heart," turning to Bertha.

"I loved the South too well to advocate secession."

"But now that they are in for it, you feel for them, and love still?"

"I do, *I do!*" said Bertha, tears starting to her eyes.

"That suits me — let's shake hands," said Broadbrim, drawing off his great, coarse glove, and displaying a hand that belied his occupation as woodman by its size and delicacy.

"Seems to me you're sailing under false colors," exclaimed Claude, staring at the fine hand folding his wondering sister's.

"Have to do it these days to carry the mail!" said woodman, looking intelligently at the three.

"I reckon this little girl would like to hear news from abroad just like as not."

"Should n't wonder!" and Claude stretched his eyes at her.

"Times have been so tight for a good many months, that the mail could n't get round; and the general postmaster suspended the operation of this office to save expenses."

"Reckon he'd like to suspend me without taking the oath?" asked Broadbrim, with a shake of his long grizzly locks, and glancing sideways at Bertha. "This little girl looks impatient," nodding at the smiling father and brother. "Well, child, I have n't got any letter for you — could n't have slipped through with it; it's all by word of mouth. The Colonel is well —"

"*Colonel!*" ejaculated Claude. "You mean Major."

"Oh, no, I don't! I mean Colonel. He was promoted for gallant conduct at the battle of Chantilly. I saw it done myself. This little girl looks pleased," he added, eying Bertha's radiant face with a queer smile.

"But I can't tell you all before your father; he's a Yankee. And I don't know but this young man has some of

his blood in him, and might do mischief," said Broadbrim, looking under at Claude.

"Better go in and talk treason then," laughed Claude, holding on to his moustache with two fingers.

Bertha took the hint, and led the way to the parlor.

"That fellow's from the Rebel army, I'm pretty sure, and ought to be arrested," said Mr. Belmont to Claude.

"Oh, he can't do any hurt. Don't interfere with—"

A half-scream from the parlor cut short the sentence. Claude sprang to the door and looked in.

The red bandanna, broadbrim, and grizzly-gray locks lay upon the carpet, and "Bertha the Beauty" was weeping and laughing in the arms of smiling, blue-eyed, auburn-haired Colonel Percy Ormund.

CHAPTER LII.

JOY AND SORROW.—BERTHA FINDS WORK TO DO.

UGHT to be arrested, by George!" growled Mr. Belmont, as he shook hands heartily with his would-be son-in-law, with a queer expression about the corners of his good-natured mouth.

"You've done me mischief enough in the past to be indulgent now," returned Percy, with serio-comic eyes.

"Then I guess I'll keep dark for the present, 'you know'—ha! ha!" said Mr. Belmont, breaking into a roar at the memory of the Colonel's former appearance and style of address.

Old Broadbrim did not apply to "Mars Provost Marshal" for a pass that day; and the golden-hued hours flew all too fast to the faithful hearts folded together for the first

time, and after a separation of almost seventeen long weary years!

As twilight settled on the sunny-faced day, Bertha was terrified to see a squad of soldiers file up and ground arms before her father's door. Something was afloat through the servants, no doubt, and our heroine was half wild with apprehension for her lover's safety.

She sprang up the back stairs, pulling Percy, cool and smiling, after her, and the Confederate Colonel was pushed out of the second-story back window, where he escaped to the roof of the third by means of a short ladder, luckily left by the tinner, drawing the ladder after him, at Bertha's frantic advice.

Our heroine now descended to the hall, trying to smooth down her ruffled plumage and get at the gist of the matter.

The General in command had been informed by "a colored lady" that Jeff Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy, had been smuggled into Mr. Belmont's house, where he was yet skulking, in countryman's garb! General Montgomery ordered the soldiers out to capture the Rebel chief.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Belmont. "I'm a Union man, square up, and would n't harbor Jeff Davis, if I knew it. I have n't seen Jeff since he seceded from Congress, and, moreover, he would n't be likely to run to a Yankee for protection. But you can examine my premises if you question my veracity. Look through, and welcome."

"I guess we won't trouble you," said the gentlemanly officer of the day, doffing his cap to Bertha's beautiful face. "Negroes are incessantly starting up some wonder, and calling out guards for a wild chase. I know your son for a staunch Union man, and feel confident he would connive at nothing that would endanger our government."

"That's so!" said Claude, turning up his eyes innocently, with a sanctimonious glance at the ceiling.

The officer laughed at the droll expression.

Claude Belmont always clawed out of a corner by wit and comicality. He knew his sister's lover was innocent of any hurtful design in venturing within the Federal lines, and Claude's conscience was easy on that score.

"It's our duty to obey orders from head-quarters, and I'll just look around a little, to satisfy the General. Men, you will not intrude—unless I find the President!" he added, smiling at Bertha, who felt no concern for her lover now.

The polite officer contented himself with a stroll through the rooms, chatting pleasantly with our pretty heroine and keeping his eyes upon her bewitching face.

If the Confederate Colonel had been ensconced in her closet, the Federal officer would not have found him "in performing his duty."

Percy Ormund came down from his high perch, laughing softly at his situation, and caught her in his arms on the second roof.

"Now this is all for you, little dear, 'you know!' Makes me feel cheap to be running from a Yankee; but I'll submit to the humiliation any moment for the sweet sake of *this!*" kissing her red mouth and hiding her curly head in his broad bosom.

"And makes me feel streaked to be screening Rebel shoulder-straps, and whipping the old boy round the stump," said Mr. Belmont, poking his head through the window, with twinkling eyes. "And dog my cats if I'd a' done it for anything else but the *sour* sake of doing penance for the past!" and the old man's head disappeared suddenly.

How fast the moments flew, and rolled around the parting hour! Happiness has wings, while care goes halting through the earth.

The radiance had all rippled away from Bertha's face,

and a cold whiteness was on the cheek that leaned against Percy's supporting breast.

But she had grown familiar with suffering silently, through long years, and her strong heart sustained her now through the hardest trial she had ever known.

They were parting, perhaps forever. Bertha felt the most fearful battles were yet to be fought; and with his bravery and exposure in an army of inferior force, how could he escape! Her faith in an overruling Power partially failed her; and she was sinking beneath the waves of her broad and deep love. But Percy's hand saved her from going down, and she walked with him over the boisterous waters.

"Little girl," he said, soothingly, "'stand still, and see the salvation of God.' We are waiting His will, and let us not tremble in anticipation. We shall meet again, Bertha—*here*, if He sees best; and if not, we shall live and love together, where faithful souls receive a just recompense and a righteous reward. But for obedience to Him, you would be mine now by other ties than those of love; and if we still trust, our hopes may die in fruition even in this world. But, dear little one, if I should fall, (there, dear, don't shudder so at the sound! school yourself to think of it with composure, for a soldier's life is surrounded with danger, and only God can shield it,) let not that shake your faith in Him on whom you now rely.

'Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His works in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.'

"You know how fondly you are loved by the heart that pillows this precious little golden head, and I do not mean to say it is not hard to let you pass from my arms; but it

is written : 'My grace is sufficient for you,' and that grace is free to all. I think I have a sufficiency to bravely bear all that may be in reservation for a trial of faith; and I would have my own dear Bertha as strong and hopeful as her soldier lover. Won't she be?" lifting her chin with his finger, and kissing the grieving mouth.

"I will *try*, Percy—I will try *hard*! You will help me?"

It was long before Percy Ormund spoke again. *He* was trying "*hard*" to master his emotions and comfort her. His fluttering heart felt how very hard it was for her—a little, weak woman—to hold her feelings in abeyance to will, when he, a strong man and a bold soldier, had enough to do to hide his own. But grace conquered the natural enemy, and Percy's Christian heart did help her to be "strong in the faith that was first delivered to the saints."

He drew her to a kneeling posture, and, with her head resting upon his shoulder, the brave soldier of the Cross, as well as of the Southern Confederacy, strengthened her weak woman's heart by a fervent petition to Him who governs and controls the affairs of earth with a firmer faith, a holier hope, and easier submission to the divine will.

And if the smile in Bertha's eyes was sad, when Colonel Ormund looked a last farewell in their loving brown depths, there was no tear there to trouble him with the memory when he was far away.

"You're in a bad cause, my boy," said Mr. Belmont, at parting; "but I know you think you're right, or you wouldn't have gone against your conscience; and I wish you may slip through it all safely, and knock under with a good grace."

"I see a Providence in all things, sir; and if we fail to establish a separate government, I shall know how to submit to the result.

"But, live or die, stand or fall, I am with my native South!" said Colonel Percy Ormund, with spirit-flashing eyes.

"That fellow's game!" muttered Mr. Belmont, as he turned away, scratching his head. "I only wish his grit was on the side of right. If he and Stonewall would climb over to the Union, we should n't have much more war, I'm thinking. I guess the Southern air is tainted with treason; and if *I* had a slavery constitution, it would be infected too!"

And Mr. Belmont but expressed the sentiment of the majority of his people in this last sentence.

Time dragged wearily away, stained with blood and saturated with tears. The strength of the Southern Confederacy was dwindling, and a draft for five hundred thousand men was ordered by President Lincoln to overwhelm the "Rebel Government."

Bertha heard from her lover now only through the public prints. She had followed him, unscathed, through many a hard-fought battle, through the Maryland raids, up to the struggle at Winchester, and there he was wounded! Even his enemies acknowledged his valor in a hopeless cause.

Bertha could not sit still now; her feet moved with the restlessness of her mind. She did not know if his wound was slight or serious. She only knew he was suffering, and she could not go to him!

Percy had said to her during their last interview:

"Do all the good you can, my dear little girl, alike to friend and foe. These boys in blue are only doing their duty, they think, as we are doing ours. Away from the battle-field we forget they are our foes; and God has commanded, 'Do good to them that hate you.' In suffering, help them, if you can."

"To fight against *you* again?" said Bertha, hiding her eyes from his glorious smile, against his fluttering heart.

Bertha wandered through the full hospitals, after the battle of Winchester, in search of something to do, and she found it ere long. But for Percy's goodness, that compassed both friend and foe, she would never have seen that face again this side of the eternal world.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE UNEXPECTED MEETING. — THE ENAMORED CHAPLAIN.

BERTHA stood motionless, gazing in silent horror upon that face. Was he dead? She would have thought so, but for the dilating of the nostrils with labored breathing.

"How long has he been here?" she inquired of the chaplain, who had become enamored of her charms, and followed her through the hospital.

"Only a day; but he lay upon the battle-ground three days and nights before he was brought off. His case is hopeless, the surgeon says. His appearance indicates it."

"Has he no friends?"

"When first brought in he was delirious, and raved of 'Bertha,' and 'wife,' but on being restored to reason, he declined my proposition to notify his friends of his situation."

"Do you know his name, and where he is from?"

"Harry Atherton, of Madison, Wisconsin."

Bertha turned quickly away, and hurried to the door, followed by the admiring chaplain, who proved, in after-days, to be a widower from New York.

Our heroine hesitated, and looked back at the death-like face. Should she leave him there to die among strangers? Percy's advice, "Do all the good you can, alike to friend

and foe," was living in her memory when she looked back at that face.

To the chaplain's surprise and curiosity, she deliberately retraced her steps and knelt down by the soldier's cot. He watched her silently at a respectful distance.

Bertha knelt there a long time, living over the past, and praying for the future of the soul that would soon go to its last account, before the sunken eyes of that dying man opened upon her earnest face.

"Oh, Bertha! my wife! my injured wife!" his arms reached after her yearningly.

"Horace, remember Louisa; do not wrong her," and Bertha eluded his eager grasp.

His hands fell over his anguished face, and Horace Stanhope groaned in bitterness of soul.

"Is that your husband?" asked the excited chaplain, unable longer to control his feelings, with a face of such evident interest and anxiety that Bertha long remembered it.

"Oh, no; his wife is far away; but we were friends in other years," said Bertha, wishing to screen him as well as herself.

The soldier looked up wildly.

"You *are* my wife! I have no other, and I am a villain!"

"You have no other, Mr. Atherton?" she exclaimed, still striving to screen him from the astonished chaplain.

"No, dear, I have no other; and you know my name is not Atherton, Bertha."

"I do, Mr. Stanhope; but you wear it."

"Throw it away! throw it away! It's time to be honest now!" he cried, wildly. "If I had always been, you would not have deserted me, Bertha! And I died to all good when I lost you! I wish I had died before I deceived her!"

"Louisa?"

"Yes, dear; Louisa—poor Louisa! We were not legally married, and it broke her heart! I was villain enough to betray her innocence, and then exult in her misery; and *she* died! I never loved her; and when my little Bertha was taken, I told her all, and it broke her heart!" groaned Horace Stanhope, in an agony of remorse.

"Who was 'little Bertha,' Horace?"

"My daughter—my idol! I loved her next to you, Bertha, and I grew desperate when she died. If there is a God, He has punished me enough in this world!" throwing his hands up restlessly.

Bertha looked at the horrified chaplain. His face plainly indicated his feelings: it was cold-white, and the broad brow contracted with inward pain.

"Death-beds are honest places," he said, solemnly. "Your name is Stanhope, then?"

"Yes, yes."

"And this lady is your wife?"

"Yes, she *is* my wife! I never was divorced, though I said it to deceived Louisa. I needed her wealth, and I obtained and squandered it. I could not be divorced *a vinculo et matrimonii*, and I married her illegally. I was n't villain enough to slander you, Bertha, and without that I could not be free to marry again. How did you know I had another wife?"

"Through Alonzo, first."

"He thought so. I played an infamous part. I would have deserted her, when I secured her wealth, and come to you, but for — Are you married?" suddenly starting up with a new thought.

"Oh, no. I was not free."

"But you might have been — *you* could have obtained full freedom, when I deceived Louisa."

"As the world goes; but not in God's sight."

"How?" betraying his astonishment in his eyes.

"No human decree can set me at liberty to marry again while you live, Mr. Stanhope. I am free from you by your own act; but my vow to God is yet binding. I said: 'so long as we both shall live;' and so long as we do, I shall not marry again."

The chaplain's hands came together right suddenly, as he turned away without a word. He soon returned; but Bertha did not see his face. She would have been startled if she had.

Horace Stanhope saw that face, and the snake hissed at it, even on a death-bed.

"I won't die, then; you are *mine*!" he exclaimed, reaching after her. But Bertha shrank away.

"I am not yours now, Mr. Stanhope. You forfeited all right to me when you married her."

"Won't you forgive me, Bertha?" he pleaded, with clasped hands.

"There is nothing to forgive, Horace. I feel only kindness and solicitude for you. You said, 'If there is a God!' Do you doubt it now?"

He lay still a while, looking at her strangely.

"Do you doubt it, Horace?"

"Dear, I don't know. Must I die?" turning to the chaplain.

"It is well to be prepared. You have a great deal to do before you are ready, I think; but God is able and willing to pardon much in a short space of time. Ask Him. *We* will help you."

"Do they say I must die?" grasping after Bertha.

"Horace, think of heaven first, and death or life after. Are you afraid to die?"

"I want the surgeon," he said, looking eagerly around;
"I must know the truth. I wished to die when they brought

me here, but now I want to live. I thought all was lost then, but it will not be lost until I die. Where is the Doctor?" to the interested chaplain.

Mr. Olney left the cot, and dispatched the steward for the surgeon. He thought it best the wounded man should know his true state, in order to turn his thoughts to the land of spirits. He saw Horace Stanhope's heart was wedded to this world, and he wished to break the bond before it was too late. He feared it was too late already, from what he had heard; for an infidel's mind cannot be melted and remoulded in a moment.

The surgeon came ere long. He was a large, fat, merry-mouthed old Frenchman, universally loved by the soldiers. But his piety could have been put in a nutshell, if it could have been found at all.

Horace turned to him, eagerly:

"Will I live? Must I die?"

"*Mon Dieu!* You can do bote on 'em! — he-a, he-a!"

"Will I recover? — tell me plainly."

"*Certainement!* when dat cut heales. *Vilain* wound, do — a-h!"

"I wish to be informed of your honest opinion. Do you think I will recover?"

"Well, a-h, *vous* may — worse cuts been —"

"Don't flatter him with false hopes," interrupted the earnest chaplain; "tell him what you *think*. The fate of an immortal soul may hang upon your words."

"A-h! Send for de priest den — may *recouvrer*, *mais* not much hope — too long on de ground — time to say *votre prières!*" said the old surgeon, with a solemnity of countenance that was unusual and impressive.

"You will soon be free, then!" and the dying man caught after Bertha so quickly that he well-nigh succeeded in securing her.

"Dear, let me hold you a little while. I shall soon be out of your way, Bertha, my wife!"

"*Mon Dieu!* dat your wife!" ejaculated the old surgeon, with white rolling eyes; "don't wondair *vous* eagair to get holt of *elle!*"

Our heroine made no reply contradictory of this assertion — she forbore to excite him further. Her pity was fully aroused.

"Are you afraid to die, Horace? Pray for pardon, that we may meet in a happier world, when the sufferings of this are ended."

"Dear, I can't think till you are nearer! I want you, Bertha. I have suffered enough for my sins, to die in your arms now. Come to me, my wife;" both lean and bloodless hands were stretched after her.

Bertha laid her small fingers within his eager clasp, struggling to keep back the upgushing tears.

"Oh, if I had been good as you, Bertha, I might have been happy now! I see it all when it is too late!" groaned the remorseful man.

"It is not too late for happiness in heaven, Horace. Turn your eyes from this world, and prepare for the one above."

"Dear, I don't want to die! I have no hope of a better world than this, and no fear of a worse one. I have lived without a God, and, if there is one, He is too far away from my heart to touch it with repentance now. But I *do* repent of my sins, because they separated me from you, Bertha — that is all!"

"Horace, if you love me, try to believe — ask God to help you, and He will. Your love for me, Horace, should convince you there is a great Fountain of Love from whence this little drop of affection has come to your heart. The soul's capacity, here in this world, should be sufficient proof of its immortality."

"Bertha, a 'little drop'? Dear, it's a boundless ocean! There's no heaven for me without you, my wife! And yet I married her!—a mock-marriage! Oh, I'm a villain! I'll own it now! But I never felt it until that Rebel Ormund gave me my death-wound. Bertha! Bertha! are you going to faint?" he cried, in evident alarm, as she sprang up and gasped for breath, with face ashen and agonized.

"Dear, do you feel for me, now that I must die?" he asked, piteously.

"Yes, Horace; I do, deeply. I must leave you now, but I will come again."

"Oh, Bertha, don't go! I shall die before you return!"

"No dangair of dat, if she don't stay two or tree days," said the old surgeon, eying her narrowly. "Bettair go rest a little — *mon Dieu!*"

"Will I live that long?"

"*Certainement* — may *recouvrer* from de *vilain* cut — keep bright — a-h!" returned the old doctor, still watching Bertha's white and agitated face.

"Dear, will you seal your pardon with a kiss? It will help me to die. *Your* God may forgive me, too. My heart was hard before you came, but your goodness has broken the rock. I will try to believe. If there is life beyond the grave, I want to live with *you* through all eternity, Bertha. That would be heaven enough."

Bertha knelt down to gratify the wish of the penitent and dying man, and it was long before she rose from his twining arms.

"*You* will stay and encourage him," she said to the chaplain.

"I will. Give yourself no concern, but more attention," he replied, as he looked down soberly upon the white face upturned to his.

CHAPTER LIV.

HORACE STANHOPE CONFESSES TO BERTHA.

DID Bertha love the penitent, dying man, who was still her husband, though crimson with crime? Almost — and her spirit yearned over his soul.

“That Rebel Ormund” had gone like a flash of electricity through her frame, and would have betrayed her to Horace Stanhope had he been the same as in other years.

But he was no longer the same. Then he threw his guilt upon other shoulders, and was clean in his own eyes; now he acknowledged his sins, and writhed beneath the burden. This was the “repentance that needed not to be repented of.” Had he been thus in years gone by, how she could have loved him!

And as Bertha knelt there in her silent chamber, and prayed for her repentant and suffering husband, she felt her own imperfections, and asked God to forgive the great sin of her past life. Bertha felt now, with that sadly-changed face — that wreck of all that was once handsome and manly in seeming — how great had been her error in deserting him. Conscience lashed her for dereliction in duty to one whose whole heart was inured in her life.

Bertha lost sight of his past sins in contemplating her own. She had never felt guilty towards Horace Stanhope till now, and her resolve for the future was formed before she rose from that soul-confession to the great High-Priest.

She had thought he had forgotten her — that he was happy in another’s love; if not happy, that she was not answerable for his unrest. But now she saw and felt, through his

changed form and dying words, as he believed, how deep was her guilt in leaving him to be tempted and tried by a world that often conquers even Christian hearts. What might she not have anticipated for him?

She knew now the pain of separation from one who is the life of our life. With all the grace that God had given her, it was hard to endure patiently absence from Percy Ormund in his wounded and suffering state. What, then, must have been his utter abandonment to evil, who had no grace to sustain him under the mighty pain of her loss! He might recover. She had known men to be restored whose condition had been hopeless. If Horace were spared, through an all-wise Providence, she would sacrifice all to wash out the great sin-stain of the past that oppressed her awakened conscience. And Percy would approve her—she knew that. She had been purified and elevated by his lofty and Christian spirit. But for his noble advice, she would probably never have seen her suffering husband again on earth. If he recovered—and Bertha fancied there was hope, from the old surgeon's last words—he would not have sought her, after his "mock-marriage" with another; he might have fallen in battle at last, and gone to the bar of God, unbelieving and hard; as he had confessed he was, ere she came to soften his stony heart.

And Percy had sent him to her! His hand had made him feel his past villany, and confess it to her whom he had wronged! The hand of him she had loved from earliest girlhood had broken the infidel heart of him who had blighted the fairest years of her life, and prepared it to receive the Truth.

Bertha was amazed at the mysterious workings of Providence, and she felt convinced that the will of God concerning her would be shown in the result of her husband's wound at the hand of her lover.

Claude Belmont was astonished by the intelligence that Bertha brought from the hospital. They had laughed at the idea of Horace Stanhope going to the war.

"Could n't get out of the draft, and caught cold, I'll bet!" said incredulous Claude.

Bertha urged him to return with her to see Horace, and he went, fully assured his sister had been imposed upon again by the wily hypocrite. He could not believe Horace Stanhope's penitence sincere, in spite of his supposed situation.

But Claude came back to his home with another belief and wholly changed feelings for his brother-in-law. His eyes looked suspiciously watery when he related to his wondering parents his interview with the suffering man.

"I cave," said Claude, with characteristic humor. "I'll own up square that I can't see old-time Horace Stanhope in the wounded soldier that bears his name. It's the Lord's doing, and it's marvellous in *my* eyes."

Horace Stanhope's story, as related to Bertha and Claude, we will give in his own words:

"After you left me, Bertha, I cursed God and defied Him to torment me more! Not that I believed there was one, but it was a relief to blaspheme his name! When your waving handkerchief grew indistinct, and all trace of you was lost in the dark depths of distance, I felt cold and hard as a stone. And that feeling followed me, Bertha, until I saw you again. After the first bitterness of parting was past, I found a little comfort in hoping I should win you back again. But when a year — that was an age to me — went by, and you gave me no encouragement, I threatened you with a divorce, thinking you would avoid the shame of such a situation by yielding to my desire. I dared not come to you, Bertha, for I —"

"I know all, Horace; 'let the dead past bury its dead;'" said Bertha, quickly, glancing significantly at Claude.

"You know all, dear?" staring at her wildly.

"Yes, Horace, pass it by; it's all over now, and you repent."

"And he does not?" pointing to Claude, whose face betrayed his interest.

"No, no!—let it lie buried, Horace; you—"

"No, dear; he must know what a villain he influenced you to marry against your will! How did you know, Bertha?"

"I heard the story soon after locating here, and traced it to you. No one suspects me of bearing any relationship to the author of the crime. With your accomplice I have become personally acquainted. His name convinced me of your guilt. He was with you when you arrived at Williamsville, Horace."

"Yes, dear." Horace Stanhope clasped his hands over his eyes, and the first blush that Bertha had ever seen upon his face passed over it then. After a pause, he turned toward the wondering brother.

"Before I saw you I was a clerk in this city. I robbed my employer, who tempted me with funds to deposit in bank, and with an accomplice in crime, who was a young man of high social position, I fled southward, and—"

Claude had sprung to his feet, with fire-flashing eyes.

"Great heavens, I have heard the story!—and you were the villain that deceived us and married my sister!"

"Even so! 'Death-beds are honest places,' said the chaplain. I know it is a death-bed, Bertha, by the desire I feel to make this confession now. I thought you were ignorant of my former residence in this town, and I wished you to remain so. Had you gone elsewhere on earth, I would have followed you."

"Mysterious are the ways of Providence. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," said Claude, looking at Bertha, with wide, sober, and significant eyes.

"With the termination of our correspondence died all my hopes. I was mad with all the world but myself. I thought you exulted in torturing me, and yet I could not hate you, Bertha. I loved you to idolatry, and I thought it was your duty to love me after you became my wife, without remembering that I had any duty to perform apart from that of worshipping you.

"Had you been blind and helpless — wholly dependent upon me for all you enjoyed — I should have been perfectly happy, Bertha; but it made me miserable to see you smile upon another! I rendered you wretched with my love, and I had not the strength and manliness to try to win you by gentleness and patience. I was cruel and tyrannical, because you could not be *driven* to reciprocate my deep affection. Oh, I was mad!" he cried, wildly straining her to his breast, "to make my own misery fourteen weary years, when I might have realized as perfect happiness as earth can afford; for if you can forgive and pity me now, my sweet wife, you could have loved me fondly then, had I been worthy. But I was not worthy, and I made you suffer for my sins. If I could re-live the past now, Bertha, I would sooner die than oppress you as I have. But it can never be recalled, dear, and I shall soon be in another world. I *hope* it will be the one to which you will go when your pure life is ended here, Bertha; if I knew that, I would be willing to die. There is nothing to live for, now that you and my baby-Bertha are lost; and you will think of me kindly when I am gone, or you would not comfort me with your dear presence now."

Bertha's deep sobs burst into a half scream — she could not have helped it, to save the world. The more he confessed his guilt, the more she felt her own; and the thought of his dying before she could atone for the past by future efforts agonized her.

Horace Stanhope was evidently surprised by the deep feeling manifested by one whom he had so deeply wronged, and his words of soothing were tender to the last degree, and bit our conscience-awakened heroine.

"Oh, Horace, I ought to have died rather than desert you! I did not bear and forbear enough. I feel my sins now."

"Dear, I have been living over the past since you came to comfort me here, and I only wonder that you endured so long. I used to think I was more sinned against than sinning; but now I see through a changed medium when it is too late! You were only human, Bertha, and could not bear inhuman wrongs. It is strange that I never felt this until I came to die! Had you not escaped from your tyrant, I might have murdered you with cruel love, as I did her by soulless indifference! She loved me, Bertha, almost as well as I did you; and yet I crushed her life out by unkindness! Oh, I don't wonder now that you abandoned to his own wickedness one so dishonest and depraved. I threw happiness from me, and misery came to punish the evil deed. Conscience acquits you of all wrong now, my dear wife. I don't wonder that you left me to suffer for my sins!"

This was what had compelled Claude Belmont to "cave." He could not doubt the sincerity of Horace Stanhope, in view of his situation. He evidently felt his "days were numbered and finished," and had no earthly motive in making this confession but to comfort her.

But Bertha could not be soothed under the pressure of such self-reproaches as his changed appearance aroused. Her very soul wept as she listened to his self-reproaches and looked upon his wrecked form.

The once shining black hair was thickly sprinkled with gray; the full, fair, oval face of olden days was sunken and

seamed and sallow ; and the large, soft, heavenly blue eyes of fourteen years ago were faded and hollow, and painfully mournful.

Bertha was wholly subjugated by the tender light that smiled upon her from their sad depths.

"Dear Horace, if God will spare you now, I'll never leave you again so long as we both shall live."

"Dear!" he gasped, and lay very still, his startled heart shaking the covering above it, and his starting eyes full of half-incredulity.

Then he caught her convulsively to his breast, and laughed aloud, with tears trickling from his glad eyes.

"I believe there is a God, *now*, Bertha, and He dwells in your heart; and I do feel grateful for this mercy in my last hours. It will soften the sting of death. I should have died hard and hopeless but for you, my Christian wife; let this truth reward you for your goodness to your unworthy husband when he is gone. Dear, I shall not live to try to make you as happy in the future as I have rendered you wretched in the past. There is no such joy for me on earth, Bertha; I have sinned too grievously. I have felt that I must die since the stony hardness left my heart; and it will be easier, now. *You* will go with me to the grave, my wife, and — what then, dear?" drawing her arm under his head and turning his face to her bosom, as if for comfort and encouragement from her lips.

"And then there is One who is 'able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto Him,' even the 'chief' of sinners — who will go with you beyond, if you will lean upon His strong arm by faith, dear Horace. 'There need not one be left behind, for God hath bidden all mankind.'"

"My little Blessing, I will try — help me.

"How long since you learned to trust Him, Bertha?" he asked, after a pause.

"Ten years, Horace. If I had possessed grace when we were married, I should have made you happier."

"Dear, would you have married me?" looking up earnestly into her thoughtful eyes.

Bertha said not a word, but a gentle shake of the head answered him.

"But had I been good after our marriage, Horace, I might have produced a change in your heart by my Christian example; 'for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife.' I did not submit enough — my spirit was too proud to humble itself to injustice. I felt wronged, and had n't the meekness to yield patiently. Had I been wholly submissive to your will from the beginning, you might have required fewer sacrifices, and learned to be less exacting. I feel my past failings now!"

"Dear, I don't see them. You yielded as long as there was any hope. Had you submitted more, I should probably have crushed your life! I wonder and shudder at my wickedness, now that Eternity has opened my eyes to see clearly the things of Time! I'm a monster in my own eyes, Bertha!"

"Then you will be a saint in heaven, my husband!" exclaimed Bertha, bursting into irrepressible tears of joy.

CHAPTER LV.

STANHOPE'S MEETING WITH PERCY ORMUND.

DURING the intervals of rest from his painful wound, Horace Stanhope related the whole of his history from the hour of her abandonment until they providentially met again.

He had gone to Rochester from the city of New York, where he first saw Louisa Demming. The young girl loved him, and made no effort to conceal her passion. She was wealthy, and presumed upon that to screen her from the impropriety of forwardness.

But Horace hoped to regain Bertha, and did not conceal his marriage. Louisa well-nigh broke her heart over the information. Horace escaped from her vicinity to Buffalo, and, as usual, became involved pecuniarily. While there, his correspondence with Bertha terminated through his own impetuosity and want of foresight.

"I grew desperate then, Bertha," he said, sadly, "and resolved to marry Louisa for her wealth, and to be revenged upon you! I consulted a lawyer, and found I could not be set at liberty to marry again, under the law of that State, without charging you with a crime that I knew you were innocent of. Bad as I was, I could not do that, Bertha; but I did worse for Louisa: I married her illegally, and committed bigamy! She thought I was divorced, and so did Alonzo; for I was villain enough to deceive them!

"I grew reckless after I married her, and plunged into dissipation and crime. I feared to remain with her father, lest he should learn to despise me, as yours did, and I should lose her wealth. I took her to Batavia, and while there, I wrote you. Had you given me any encouragement, I would have deserted her — but you did not respond to my letter."

"I thought you were divorced, Horace."

"Would you have answered me, if you had not been so informed, dear?"

"Yes, sir. I never meant to cast you off wholly. I only wanted rest. I was tired; and I thought if you loved me truly, you would try to reform, if you found that was the only way to succeed in your hopes. I never gave you up,

until you threatened me with a divorce. Then hope was consumed in the flame of my pride! I would have corresponded with you till now, Horace."

"Oh, Bertha, what a blind fool and villain I have been!" groaned the repentant man.

"It's all over now, Horace," she said, soothingly.

"I failed in Batavia, and absconded with Louisa to Cleveland, and —"

"Engaged in the photograph business," she said, smilingly.

"Dear?" he looked up at her in astonishment.

Bertha told him all.

"I never heard of you but once, Bertha, after I married her; then it was through a little poem copied without credit to the original journal; and it broke my heart! I would have written you then, but for my little Bertha. I think she was all that prevented me from deserting Louisa years ago. Well as she loved me, I cared nothing for her, but took pleasure in paining her heart by proving my indifference. I learned then how hard it was for you to love me simply because I worshipped you. After her father's death, I obtained possession of her wealth, and in three years it was all squandered, and we were poor as when we left Batavia! But she never complained, and loved me through all—poor Louisa! When Lincoln ordered the draft, I escaped to Canada to avoid it; and there my little darling died.

"Instead of softening, it made me harder, Bertha. I grew savage and furious, and wreaked my vengeance upon the suffering and helpless mother! I told her all, in my wild agony, and her heart broke before they buried our child! They sleep side by side now on British soil, and their spirits are happy in heaven. I think there is a heaven now, Bertha; and I believe God and you, my good little wife, are helping me to find it!

"Then I returned to the States, and enlisted for the war. I was doubly desperate. I had lost you and my little girl, and life was a burden. I hated myself now, and all mankind—except you, dear. I never thought of you, Bertha, without a longing desire to take you in my arms, and hear you say you forgave me before I died. Dear, say it now."

"I do forgive you, Horace," striving to repress the tears.

"But I hated your father and brother, Bertha, as much as I loved you. I thought I owed all my misery to them, forgetting it was through their influence that I obtained your hand.

"I fancied you had gone South, knowing your Southern principles; and in my first and last battle I looked for Claude in the Rebel ranks. Had I seen him there, I would have strained every nerve to reach his heart before that brave Ormund paralyzed my own! Dear, you are deathly pale! Do you hate me now, Bertha?"

"No, Horace; but it hurts me to think of the past. You don't feel so now?"

"No, dear; the bitterness has all gone from my soul. I feel no unkindness for any one now; and I would sooner be butchered by Claude than strike a blow that would reach *your* heart."

"Do you feel no hardness towards him who has laid you here, Horace?"

"No, Bertha. It was the fate of war. He was doing his duty, he thought, towards his 'native South'; and I was fighting for revenge, and not from patriotism!"

"How did you know him among so many, Horace?"

"*Him*, dear?—'Colonel Ormund the Brave?' They swear by his name in the Union army! and the man who brings him down, if he is known, will be immortalized; and if he escapes, God will be his shield, for our men long for his life—he's a terror to his foes, and a target for thousands!

I wounded him, Bertha, and he returned good for evil, by letting out my stony nature with the edge of his sword. I thank him for the wound that has given you back to my arms. How you tremble, my little wife!"

"I am nervous. Did you wound him seriously, Horace?"

"I thought him dead till after the battle, for I saw him fall from his horse and carried from the field. Oh, you should have seen him, Bertha; he was glorious in battle. He is very tall, and flashed along the lines on a shining black fiery steed, like an avenging spirit! If there was an unyielding point in our front, Colonel Ormund had only to dash down upon it with his magical battle-cry, 'God, and our native South!' and the solid phalanx was broken as if by superhuman power! And wherever there is a strong point, 'Colonel Ormund the Brave' is invariably found; and he gallops through the fiery shower of shot and shell as though panoplied with impenetrable armor! Our men fear him — they say he possesses a charmed life; and wherever he carries it upon the field, the enemy weakens and gives back!"

"But *you* wounded him, Horace, perhaps mortally!"

"No, dear, not mortally. He came to me after the battle, and ministered to my wants like an angel of mercy."

"Horace!" with reddening cheeks and starting eyes.

"He seemed to grow reckless when his men fell back and fled in disorder, Bertha. He dashed over the field, vainly trying to rally them; but as our boys pressed on and carried dismay and death into the Rebel ranks, he appeared to court destruction with the rout of his troops, and rushed into the hottest of the fire — and with *such* a face, Bertha! It was like rock! I don't know why it was, but my eyes followed him over the field — he charmed me.

"He is a North Carolinian, Bertha. Our regiment captured his State flag, and Colonel Ormund was like 'a bear

robbed of her whelps.' He dashed headlong over the dead and dying through storms of leaden hail and leaping fire, and re-captured it, with a sweep of his sparkling sword that sent the daring boy in blue to his long home!

"It was then I succeeded in reaching him. I saw him leaping along the plain on his foaming war-steed, with that face of marble and drawn sword; and heard his startling battle-cry: 'God, and our native South!' as he cut down the capturer, and grasped the fluttering flag; and I aimed steadily at the gallant Rebel, and fired. I had nerve there, Bertha; despair had rendered me fearless. Our men were giving back before his prancing and leaping steed and death-dealing sword; and he discovered his would-be-destroyer.

"I saw him waver a moment, and the flag went down; but he caught it under his arm, and plunged after me. I met his blazing eye, and caught his terrible shout, 'God, and our native South!' as he dashed after me, and I turned to fly in mortal terror. It was the first feeling of fear I had realized since I entered the army.

"But I could not escape his strong and brave arm, and his steel went through my granite side and laid the villain low!

"Our men had fallen back, and left the front clear; and I saw my conqueror bounding away towards his scattered troops; and, Bertha, I sat up and discharged the second barrel of my rifle at him. I yearned for his life; and I was happy when I saw horse and rider go down, and his men rush in and bear him off!

"Then I fell back, dead to all sight and sound.

"When I awoke to consciousness, the dead were heaped around me, and all was still under the gloomy night-sky. I crawled away to a clump of evergreens, and lay down, as I thought to die; but I was hard as adamant yet.

"I heard groans not far away through the long, long night; and when the morning came, I found a wounded Rebel in the shade of the young pines that was my retreat. He was shot in the ankle, and cut on the arm. I was glad I was not alone, and we grew familiar while waiting three weary days and nights for help. We had a little food; he had water, and I had whiskey, and we managed to live through that terrible time, until Ormund and Walter Eldon came to our aid."

"Horace! Walter Eldon? — poor Edalia!"

"Yes, dear, Walter Eldon. We saw them coming through the twilight, evidently looking for some one among the fallen men. My companion shouted 'Walter!' and they dashed up, with an answering shout, at the well-known sound."

"My fellow-sufferer was Charles Chester, Bertha; and Captain Eldon was searching for his friend."

"Oh, Horace! will he die? It would break Minnie's heart!"

"Dear, I hope not. He was a good fellow, though a staunch Rebel. He defended his faith as well as any man could, and I knew he was honest in his belief. As for me, it was not principle I was fighting for, but from prejudice. I hated the South, and longed to grind it to powder. But Lieutenant Chester was 'proving his faith by his works.' You should have seen Eldon when he discovered me, Bertha. He recoiled as if from a serpent, and ejaculated:

"'Horace Stanhope! — great heavens!'"

"'Yes,' I said, bitterly, 'I am Horace Stanhope, killed, at last, by a Southern hand. There — your Colonel is my murderer!'"

"I never saw such a face as that Ormund had, Bertha. I could not define its expression. The blood rushed over it, and left it in an instant white as death. Then he reeled,

and leaned on Eldon a moment. I wondered that he should feel so for a fatal blow given to a foe in battle.

"Dear, that noble man first softened my stony heart! The rock has been mouldering away since that hour! You have finished the work that he began!

"He knelt down there, Bertha, and dressed the wound he had made with hands gentle as a mother's; speaking words of comfort and hope to a fallen foe who had given him the first blow!

"I told him so, and he smiled strangely, saying he 'carried no feelings of revenge and animosity away from the battle-ground. He was in arms for the defence of his struggling native South, and cherished no personal unkindness for those who were fighting to subjugate it. Away from the battle-field he forgot we were his foes!'

"I had never heard such a sentiment as that expressed before, Bertha, and it struck me dumb. I knew our men thirsted for *his* blood, in calm as well as storm; and I felt warm toward the strange man.

"He placed me as comfortably as possible, put a knapsack under my head, and covered me with a blanket; filled my canteen with water, and with cheering words to his foe, directing me to a better world beyond this; and promising me speedy aid from my own men, he went away, bearing my late companion with him.* Why do you weep so, Bertha, my wife?"

"Oh, Horace, it's enough to break a heart of stone!"

"Yes, dear; and it broke mine! That man sent information to our army by flag of truce, Bertha, and our men, ere long, bore me away from the clump of pines. I became delirious, then, and when I awoke to reason I was in your home. 'Colonel Ormund the Brave' sent me to you by a

* A truth; related to the author by a wounded Federal soldier who died in hospital.

blow in defence of his 'native South,' to receive your pardon for wrongs in this world, before I go to another. I know, now, the bravest in war are the kindest in peace; and those we think wrong, are fighting hard from a feeling sense of duty and right. The result of the war will doubtless go against the South; but they are a brave people in battle, and humane to their fallen foes. I can testify to that, Bertha."

CHAPTER LVI.

OLD FRIENDS AND WAR-TIMES IN BERTHA'S EARLY HOME.

WALTER ELDON and Charles Chester were gone to the war as captain and lieutenant, and the old men and mourning wife of Walter sat in Mr. Redmond's home, watching for the return of the soldiers and Minnie, the wounded man's wife. Minnie had gone to Richmond to accompany her husband home, and Walter had obtained a furlough for the same purpose.

There was no longer music and mirth, dancing eyes, and playful fingers in Edalia's home. Clouds of care and tears of torturing suspense had dimmed and darkened the olden brightness and bloom. Their negroes were all gone, saving Di and her old Christian mother, and a faithful old servant of Dr. Montrose, who had grown up with him. Even petted Dick had gone off with the Yankees, through fear of being "sold down South if he did n't escape to the North with his best friends!"

They had experienced a trying time since the first gunboat of the enemy steamed up the Roanoke and tarried at "Redmond's Landing." Negroes from the "low grounds"

and "back country" had hurried to their Northern liberators, bearing with them all they could steal from their masters. The Federal gunboats swarmed with white teeth shining through thick lips on black faces; and their late owners felt relieved when they were gone.

The Union soldiers wandered through the country in quest of arms and eatables—"beauty and booty"—and they did not return empty. The aristocratic residences around our heroine's old home made their eyes snap with satisfaction. Pigs and poultry, kine and sheep, became scarce in that section, before the Yankee gunboats, laden with patriotism, "fired up" and put back to Plymouth.

Edalia and Minnie had heard the great guns bombarding Williamsville and Hamil as they came up, and soon learned our Bertha's town-home of other years was laid in ruins.

But they trembled more when the brave defenders of the Stars and Stripes came to their residence to search the premises for hidden arms and ammunition. They would have been content had the enemy in blue captured only "contraband articles;" and wondered if it were considered "treason" to possess silverware and silk clothing! If it were, our friends were guiltless of the crime when the patriots were gone!

And they wondered, too, if "Uncle Sam's" purse would be benefited by the wealth that had been taken possession of "in the name of the Federal Government,"—but they never knew.

Walter Eldon's hat was captured by Union, and fitted perfectly. Soldier concluded, if the cap fit he'd wear it; and put his brass-lettered head-piece in his pocket.

"You don't want that!" exclaimed Edalia, with open eyes.

"Guess I dew," said Yank, spitting lustily upon the carpet and rubbing it in with his shoe, covered with river-mud.

"Oh, don't take my husband's hat!" pleaded the poor wife, whose loving heart ached at the thought of losing anything that Walter used to wear.

"Your husband is a Rebel, fighting against his Government, d—— him!" snarled Patriotism, who was wearing his Government's insignia, and stealing for himself.

"But he wouldn't rob your wife of your hat in your absence," returned Edalia, with tearful eyes.

"*That's* so, by ——! We'll knock the blazes out 'n the traitor 'fore he gits up tew our house — haw, haw!" bringing one big yellow fist down upon the other hard, freckled hand, exultingly, and nauseating the apartment with his brandy-tinctured breath.

Edalia appealed to the officer in command, who remonstrated with the soldier, and eventually prevailed upon him to put the hat down. Private relinquished it with a scowl, and repaid himself for the sacrifice in another quarter.

Every drawer, nook, and corner was rummaged; and Edalia wondered if they looked for war implements in the little pill-boxes they examined so carefully. Perhaps they hunted for percussion-caps, she concluded.

Unfortunately, she had left her purse in a bureau-drawer, and it fell into the hands of the hat-admirer.

Union Brass-buttons pounced upon it like a hawk upon a young brood, and no entreaties or arguments could prevail upon him to relinquish his prize. He walked off, chuckling over the "haul" he'd made "out 'n that d—— Rebel in the big house!"

Federal officer did n't interfere this time. Perhaps he thought it was too much like "slavery" to make a man do his duty twice in one day. Edalia was robbed of every dollar she had at command, by men who were fighting gallantly *for their country!**

* True incidents of the war, related to the author by the sufferer.

Edalia heard a scream from Di, and following the sound, saw the girl struggling in the grasp of a boy in blue, who was endeavoring to persuade her to accompany him to the boat.

Di was a lady-like house-maid, and Philanthropist thought it hard she should remain in her present state of bondage. He resolved to break her chains by force, if she was too simple to throw them off.

Di gave him her fist, without being particular where, and Free-soil secured the pugilistic hand. Then the girl screamed with terror.

"If you're opposed to slavery, I should suppose you would be willing to leave the girl free to act for herself. She can go North or remain South, just as she prefers," said Mr. Redmond, dryly.

"D—— your Rebel soul! I'll give yeou slavery!" shouted Yank, snatching a pistol from his belt and discharging it at the old man's head, luckily without hitting the mark.

Di screamed louder, and fell down in mortal fear; while Edalia uttered a shriek of apprehension for her uncle, and little Edward and Eva made up a startling chorus.

Officer arrested private, and sent him under guard to the gunboat. There was no money at stake, and he did his duty once more.

This was the last time the Federal gunboats ascended to "Redmond's Landing." The whole country around was desolated, and there was nothing more for the locusts of war to eat.

They had killed Mr. Redmond's last milch-cow. She was shot down by Patriotism before Edalia's eyes, the day it captured her purse; and there was little left, after their departure, for nature to subsist upon.

The word "rebel" was a passport to outrage whenever a Southern man possessed aught that Patriotism coveted; and

it became a parrot-note throughout the whole region of "Dixie."

"Jones's Store" was sacked, although the proprietor was a foreigner without a relative, and had never been in the Southern army; but there was whiskey under the roof, and Patriotism's throat was dry from fighting so bravely *for its country*; therefore the merchant was a "rebel," and, consequently, robbed.

Nearly five years of struggling life had gone, and the hopes of the "Confederacy" had gone with them. The South had given its Northern enemies an opportunity to rob it of its wealth, and gained nothing to compensate it for the loss. They were poor in purse, and poorer in spirit, when old year Sixty-Four went out, and Sixty-Five came in.

Charles Chester had been in hospital three months, before he could be removed to his home. This was the third wound he had received in the Southern cause, and the most severe.

Walter had escaped with slight cuts and bruises from fragments of shell.

Peter Simpkins was second lieutenant in Walter's company; lost an arm the first year of the war, and his pride was forever humbled. He was more endurable after than before his misfortune. Peter was still a bachelor at forty, but was about to marry his cousin.

Rosa Simpkins, Peter's affianced, was neither handsome, talented, nor rich, but amiable and devotedly pious—the very one to help Peter on to a better world; and he learned to appreciate her when his high head was brought low by the hissing bombshell that carried away his right arm.

"Bertha the Beauty," in childhood, had heard Rosy say to her leader in a Methodist class-meeting, one day, she "wanted all the religion she could get." And it was thought she tried hard, and succeeded.

Colonel Henley was killed in the first battle at Bull Run,

and Mrs. Wilmer Tomlin Henley was ready for a third victim. But her chances for success were painfully slim, now that all her portable property had gone down the Roanoke in a Union gunboat, with men who were fighting *for their country* and feathering their nests.

Dora was the wife of a Confederate general and the mother of five children. She looked old and care-worn.

Mrs. Colonel Wilmer was broken in spirit. The loss of her wealth broke her heart, figuratively; but her "fire was not quenched."

Colonel Wilmer was a Whig and staunch Union man from the dawn of Secession; but it did n't save his property. It went down the Roanoke with Patriotism in a Federal gunboat propelled by *loyal* steam, because the Colonel was a "rebel!" He retained his land, simply because it could not be conveniently carried down the river.

Dora drove up to Mr. Redmond's, to hear news from her husband, the day the soldiers were expected home. Her turnout was extremely interesting — an old creaking cart, with an older mule attached, who looked down in the mouth as mule could well look at his advanced age. Her oldest boy of eleven was the driver.

There was not a carriage, horse, cow, or pig left in all that section, if it were worth transporting and could be found.

To Dora's great joy, her husband accompanied the captain and lieutenant. He had "run down" from Richmond for a few days, to see the wounded soldier safe and visit his family. It was a glad surprise to all parties.

There were happier hearts under Mr. Redmond's roof, that first day of Sixty-five, than had gathered beneath it in many a dark month gone by.

They saw the end of the war not far away; and though it would not bring independence to the "Southern Confed-

eracy," it would bring peace to the country, and friends back to their mourning homes.

They would be a conquered people, but the world would acknowledge them a brave one. They had fought valiantly in a hopeless cause, and failed through inferior numbers, and an enemy in their midst.

The world wondered that they had "held out so long." Their strength was crushed, but their soul was not humbled. Their native and sectional pride burned brighter than ever before. They gloried in "State Rights" and "Southern chivalry," and their mental and moral superiority to the "fag ends" with whom they had fought. They had been pushed into rebellion by Northern aggression upon Southern rights, and lost their property and rights by attempting to vindicate their honor. Whatever the result might be—and they had no doubt of it now—they would accept it in as good faith as they had wielded the sword to defend their Southern soil and desolated homes.

"Might had conquered right," in their estimation; the wheel of fortune had stuck in the mud, and though they had given their shoulder to remove it, no Jupiter had come to their assistance. Thousands had fallen in the ineffectual effort to push forward the car, and they were hopeless of being able to extricate it with the force that remained; for the day of miracles was long past. They scorned the name of "traitor" and "rebel" as much as they despised those of "abolitionist" and "Black Republican." But for the last two, they would never have received the first.

"That Carolina Colonel Ormund is a brave fellow, by Jupiter!" said Mr. Redmond, with something of his olden humor. "Gone right up, almost to the top notch of distinction; while you, cowardly dogs, have held your own!"

"There's luck in odd numbers," returned Walter, smiling, "and Percy refuses to change it for a higher-sounding title.

Might have been General now, but he declined the honor, after the battle of Winchester, for some unaccountable cause. Says he prefers the Colonel as a handle to his name; but I'm inclined to the belief, something covert induced the declension."

"Well, that's a strange piece of business! Got a wound in Winchester — bad one?"

"Not very. It healed in a month. The only wound he's received in battle that required nursing despite his brave daring. And that came from that rascal Horace Stanhope!"

Mr. Redmond came to his feet as though lifted by electricity. He looked wild, and completely bewildered for some moments, staring at Walter with vacant eyes. Then he ran his fingers through his gray hair, as though collecting his scattered thoughts, and sat down slowly and dreamily.

The company was struck by his strange manner and appearance.

"Percy Ormund wounded by Horace Stanhope, did you say?" inquired the old man, soberly.

"I said so, uncle. He wounded him in the arm, and then lamed his horse. Like to have broken the Colonel's neck by the fall, too!"

"If he'd killed him, I might have thought something," said Mr. Redmond, gazing into the fire absently.

"What would you have thought, Uncle Ned?" Minnie's curiosity was wide awake now.

"Oh, never mind. I don't tell my thoughts to such leaky mouths, by Jupiter! And so that rascal is alive yet, eh?"

"I don't know, sir; he was badly wounded."

"Hey?" The old man's eyes dilated. "How do you *know*, I say?"

"I saw him after the battle, while looking for Charles. Percy, I think, gave him his death-blow. It was a bad gash!"

"Percy — Percy Ormund killed Horace Stanhope?" Mr. Redmond had risen from his chair, and leaned on the back of it, with a countenance that puzzled the observers.

"Percy wounded him with his sword, after Stanhope had shot him in the left arm. The fellow looked like a fury when he pointed to Percy, and said, 'There, your Colonel is my murderer!'"

"And Percy — did he know him?"

"Never saw him till then, and only knew his name through my astonished exclamation. But I never saw such a face as he exhibited when Stanhope called him his murderer. I never knew him to tremble until he leaned on my shoulder, then."

"Ha, ha!"

"Why, Uncle Ned!" exclaimed Minnie, in amazement.

"And you think Stanhope will die?" inquired the old man, without noticing her surprised face or impulsive language.

"I think he can hardly recover, under the circumstances; if it were a curable cut, under the most favorable."

And Walter related the whole story to eager listeners.

"Did the Colonel know his patient was the ex-husband of an old-time friend?" asked Mr. Redmond, soberly, with shut eyes.

"I found that he did; but how he learned it I could not discover, though I tried to draw him out; but I suppose it was through her writings, as an author's history is pretty apt to be dragged before the public, if it's any ways peculiar — and Percy is very familiar with her works, and one of her greatest admirers."

"Is Percy married?" inquired the old man, coolly.

"No, sir — never was."

"Why, Uncle Ned, you blush like a girl!" laughed Minnie, clapping her hands.

"Oh! I see it now — he's jealous of the Colonel! If

Stanhope dies, Esquire Redmond is going up after 'Bertha the Beauty,' and he's mortally afraid of being cut out by 'Colonel Ormund the Brave!' — say, Uncle Ned?"

"Hum!" grunted 'Uncle Ned,' as he laid himself back in his chair, turned up his nose, and sniffed, in smiling disgust.

"Young folks," said the old man, seriously, "'there's a Divinity that shapes our ends, roughhew them as we will.' You think you're doing your duty as soldiers, and the Yankees think they're doing theirs, (some of 'em.) But the Lord *knows* what is right, and I believe He will do what is best for us all. I reckon the Confederacy is going to wreck, but it won't carry us all with it. I think we shall be able to survive, and some hearts will swim ashore from the foundered ship, and not grieve long over its loss. They will see it only carried them over the waters to a better land. You say the Colonel is pious?"

"I never saw a more practically pious man, sir; and that is the secret of his bravery. He feels he is doing his duty, and is prepared to go into eternity when the summons comes; and he is not afraid to die. I never saw a man so fearless of exposure; and it is a marvel how he has escaped."

"'The Lord is a shield and buckler.' I reckon it'll all come out right," said the old man, musingly, with a mystery shining about his mouth.

"What will?" asked Minnie, with curious eyes.

"Oh, a good many things, if they work well — 'specially two."

"I never did see such a man!" said Minnie, shaking her shoulders impatiently, with a wrinkle between her half-shut eyes — "there's no getting anything out of you, for love or money!"

"Oh, I'm safe as a thief in a mill, by Jupiter!" and Mr. Redmond put his hand on his mouth, and winked over his shoulder, so that Minnie could see.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LAST OF EARTH. — BERTHA'S PRESENTIMENT.

MR. OLNEY, the chaplain, was a constant attendant beside the cot of Horace Stanhope. Bertha would have removed her penitent husband to her home, with her parents' sanction — who had visited their son-in-law at the hospital and convinced themselves of his sincerity — had his situation rendered it prudent. But the old surgeon absolutely forbade it "for the present."

Bertha believed he would recover, from the surgeon's evasive replies to her inquiries; but Mr. Olney knew the doctor's opinion better than she was permitted to learn; and when the seventh sun arose upon his living but suffering form, Bertha felt the danger was past.

Horace smiled very sweetly when she expressed her feelings with this regard — as he had never smiled upon her in years gone by — but he did not encourage the thought. He felt more than she could comprehend. But her hopeful eyes alleviated his pains.

"Dear," he said, tenderly, "it would be sweet to live, now that I have you; but if it's God's will, I am ready to die. I am not afraid now, my sweet wife. I *might* make you unhappy again if I should be restored — He only knows — and I would rather die now than do that, Bertha. Dear, I have done too wickedly for you to love me now, well enough to suffer much when I am gone; but you will love me always when we meet again. You have taught me how to die. Let that comfort you until you come to me."

And then Horace Stanhope fell asleep, with her arm

under his head, and his last kiss upon her lips — asleep from the excruciating pains that racked his emaciated form.

“Bettair takè *vous* arm from under de head, now,” said the old surgeon, kindly, when she had sat there a long time.

“It will disturb him?” and Bertha looked inquiringly.

“Nevair — he wake no more, *madame*. He under de influence of chloroform — sleep hisself to death — a-h! Make him sleep to spare de pain. He die soon, *certainement* — no hope from de first — too long on de ground — *vilain* cut — a-h!”

Then Bertha knelt down and laid her head upon the faintly beating heart that had loved her so well through long years of anguish, even while it tortured her own; and its last pulse throbbed against her tear-washed face.

Horace Stanhope’s handsome face — handsome even with its sunken features and graying hair — looked calm and happy in its last long sleep; and Bertha was comforted by its placid and sweet expression.

But her heart wept over the memory of her desertion and his subsequent sufferings — conscience condemned her for the past. Had she done her whole duty, he would not have sinned so grievously, and endured such remorse for his crimes.

Bertha felt that she was more guilty than he, as she knelt there above that pulseless heart, and watched that grief-worn face. She could not forbear expressing her convictions of wrong towards her dead husband to the attentive chaplain. He said:

“When we lose sight of another’s wrongs, our own are magnified. There are things censurable in the history of every one, even the best; for humanity will err; but let the consciousness that his earthly sufferings have led to eternal repose, and that you ‘have taught him how to die,’ soften your regrets. Perhaps by a different course on your part

his infidel mind would never have acknowledged the true faith. The sealed volume of God's mysteries alone will reveal the secret of His ways, and the instrumentalities He employs to bring sinners to repentance and a knowledge of Him.

"I do not believe that God imposes upon us more than is necessary for our salvation; for 'He is good, and His mercy endureth forever.' Some require heavier chastisement to purify their soul, and your husband confessed his punishment was just.

"From what I have learned, it was not your design to abandon him wholly. *He* placed the barrier between you for all time; and why should you grieve for what you could not avoid? You will say you might have avoided it by remaining with him, and enduring until death; but God saw from the beginning what the end would be, and nothing could change the course of human events that He knew would transpire in the journey of life. 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,' and 'all things are wisely ordered, and nothing left to chance or fate.' He has, 'through great tribulation entered into the kingdom,' and he does not regret now the sorrows that were a necessary means to bring him to that Rest."

Bertha's restless mind was quieted, but not healed by the kind minister's efforts to soothe it to rest. She felt justified for her course, before knowing the desperate result of her desertion. Had he been happy with Louisa, she would have felt no such compunctions of conscience now. But she had driven him to crime and bitter remorse by her want of forbearance with his deathless love; and Bertha's very soul grieved for the misery that was plainly read in that poor and pallid face.

"Oh," she said, yearningly, to sympathizing Claude, "if he could but have lived long enough for me to take the

soul-pain out of this sunken face! It's a monument to the memory of a violated vow, and will haunt me forever, although I know he is happy now. I ought to have died at the post of duty, rather than desert it and live. I wish I had!" And Bertha fell back in her brother's arms, with a cry that startled him by its depth of woe.

"It's all right," returned Claude; "'what is to be, will be,' and you are no more guilty of wrong now, than when he drove you from him by dishonesty and jealous tyranny. You would not have been justifiable in heaven's or human sight, in giving your life and ours to gratify such as he once was. I am glad he saw his sins, and repented of them before he died. God works through instrumentalities, and through you, Horace has entered into His rest. He made his own unhappiness, and you are not responsible for his sufferings. 'The way of the transgressor is hard,' and he only reaped that which he sowed. He rests now; and don't make yourself miserable over fancied derelictions in duty. You will see clearer when you think deeper. Your thoughts are now on the surface of your own sins, and don't dive to the bottom of his. It will ripple off in silver bubbles in a little while; and God's will must have its way;—you are *free* now," said Claude, looking under her drooping curls soberly and intelligently.

A sobbing sigh was her only answer; but Claude saw something in her eyes that troubled him; yet he would not question her now.

It was all over. The muffled drum, the dead-march, the farewell shot over the soldier's grave, and Horace Stanhope was shut out for all time from the sunlight and blue skies that shone above his last resting-place, with only one to weep around his buried form. But if Horace Stanhope's spirit was permitted to look down upon his own grave, it smiled to see that lone mourner was the one he had so loved

in life, and in whose heart he longed most to be remembered in death.

Bertha and Claude stood there beside that new-made grave, when the rest were gone, silent and solemn.

"Oh, I'm glad! I'm glad!" and Bertha's small hands came together in a firm clasp as she spoke.

Claude Belmont bent down and looked in her face with astonished eyes. He could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses.

"You are *glad*, sister?"

"Yes, I'm glad! — I'm *so* glad, now, Bud!"

"Glad he's dead?" and Claude's eyes opened wider.

"Oh, Claude!" and Bertha shivered while she looked her reproach. "No, no! I'm glad I did n't marry Percy! Oh, if I had married him!" and her wet eyes shuddered at the thought.

Claude smiled with satisfaction.

"I thought you would be glad some day—if not in this world, in the next. You might have been justifiable by law, human law; but 'God sees not as man seeth'; and if you had not sacrificed your wish to His command, I believe Percy would not have escaped till now. That is my faith. There is retributive justice in the earth; and Percy might have fallen by the hand of Horace, and left you to atone for your sin by life-long penitence—who knows? But now, by obedience to Him through great sacrifice, Horace's last hours were brightened by your forgiveness and care; his soul is saved through your softening influence, and the 'great net' that you could n't 'shake off,' has been taken away by Him for whose will you were waiting, and you are wholly free now," said Claude, as they left the cemetery, trying to turn her thoughts into a pleasanter channel than they had been flowing through for many days.

"I don't feel here," laying one hand over her heart, "that

Percy and I will ever meet again on earth. Horace said he had sinned too grievously to enjoy such happiness as restoration to health would yield after our reunion; and I know something of his feelings now. If Percy should die,"— with a soft catch of the breath, and momentary pause, — "I know it will be as a punishment for what Horace has suffered through me. It may be necessary for me to endure a greater cross, in order that I, too, may reach the crown — it *may* be!" said Bertha, with a strange expression upon her white face.

"Poh! poh!" and Claude turned up his nose facetiously, and stretched his eyes at her, to drive the shade from her brow. "Such morbid thoughts are only the result of recent watchings and anxiety. They will fly away, when Percy comes in with another load!

"Such morbid thoughts will ruin your mind," he continued, as Bertha only answered with a sickly smile; "you have always been too brave and strong to be conquered now by a little blue imp — throw it away!"

"Throw it away!" That is what Horace said when we first met at the hospital, — 'throw it away!'"

"Yes; and there is another proof of the Lord's design. Try to read Providence aright. Horace assumed that name to screen him from his friends, if he fell in battle; and had he not been wounded by Percy, and recognized by Eldon, he might have died upon some distant field, and never been discovered. Then you and Percy would have waited life-long, and only been rewarded in heaven — don't you see?" said Claude, peeping under at her softening face.

"If Horace had been restored, would you have been as happy with him as you would be with Percy?" he asked, presently.

"No, no! and that is why I am afraid — no, not *afraid*; but I have a presentiment that I shall suffer for it. It may

be a morbid fancy, and I hope it is; but he loved me so deeply, through all, and I only *pitied* him at last!" confessed Bertha, with tearful eyes.

"You are not responsible for that, sis. 'Love is not the growth of years, nor gift of will.' I am more guilty than you. You were induced to marry him without love, and he was not one to win you afterwards. We are not answerable for what it is impossible to perform."

"I would have performed my duty at any sacrifice, if he had lived, with divine assistance. It would not be so hard now, even if he were unchanged."

"I think you would," said Claude, slipping his arm around her small waist as they walked, and lifting her over dry ground; "and let this satisfy you, now that God has seen best to remove him from between you and one you love — one who loves you as well as Horace, and has been more faithful, and has no stain upon his honor for you to remember with regret in coming years, as you would unavoidably have done of Horace, had he been spared."

Bertha was cheered and comforted by gay and affectionate Claude, who would not suffer her to "snub sky-blue in a corner for other people's sins," as he expressed it with a whine and wrinkled-up nose. But there was a feeling about her heart in secret — a dead weight that she could not remove — that Percy Ormund's finger-traces along the fair lines of a flag-of-truce letter only lifted away at last.

Percy told her of his meeting with Horace Stanhope, and under what circumstances — not imagining she had heard it all, and more, from Horace's own penitent lips.

If it was God's will, he said, that Horace should die by his hand, he thought it was an evidence of His favor respecting their future hopes; and advised her to look for the wounded soldier's name in the daily list of "killed and wounded."

Percy did not dream that Horace's name would never have appeared in print, had not Bertha met him before he died.

Percy's second letter, after Horace's death, removed every feeling of self-reproach that had troubled her tender conscience since her dying husband's humble confession and plea for pardon.

If Percy acquitted her of wrong, Bertha felt she was guiltless; for her lover was so pure and good in our heroine's brown eyes, that she believed he could not look upon sin with any degree of allowance. The shadow melted away from her inner life, and she felt no sting of conscience for the past when she laid flowers upon Horace's grave. He was happy now in another world through God's infinite goodness and mercy, and she was hopeful in this. Percy had taught her faith in the Divine will concerning their future oneness in life as well as heart.

Six months passed away, and "all quiet along the Potomac!" was the daily cry. Colonel Ormund was with Lee's army at Richmond, and *she* "was quiet," so long as the lines along the Potomac were.

Our heroine dared not think of a coming battle around the Confederate capital. She remembered Horace's description of Percy when his State-flag was captured at Winchester; and she knew well how he would fight to defend the archives of his country. But April came, and "Colonel Ormund the Brave" was among the list of "killed," in the last struggle for Southern independence!

CHAPTER LVIII.

SHOULDER-STRAPS AND PRIVATE CAPS.—COL. ORMUND
THE BRAVE.

MR. OLNEY did not suffer his acquaintance with our fair heroine to end with her visits to the hospital, under his ministerial charge. He became a frequent visitor at her home, and evidently more enamored, by time.

Bertha soon discovered his object, and deprecated the trying hour. It pained her to refuse a lover; and she wished heartily all men's eyes were as loyal to their judgment as they professed to be to their Government. She did not mean those who stole from the United States Treasury by wholesale, and retailed private property under the plea of "military necessity."

Bertha was amazed at the many and great wrongs that had been perpetrated by men who professed to be brimming with patriotism and running over with enthusiasm for the good of the Union. From what she had seen, and knew to be true from reliable information, Bertha thought the patriotism of some men was overflowing, under shoulder-straps and private caps, not only for the "good" of the "Union," but for the "*goods*" of the whole people—South of Mason and Dixon's!

She wondered how plundering private dwellings, and sending the stolen goods up to the soldiers' Northern homes, in well-laden boats and cars, was going to benefit the Union, or soften the asperity between the two sections.

Was it not unusual patriotism that set fire to an editor's establishment, and cut the hose to prevent the flames from being extinguished, simply because of a published article

respecting an outrage perpetrated by Union soldiers upon an Episcopal minister, at St. Paul's, upon the holy Sabbath? That was a well-known fact in the community. And was it not great love of country that boxed up that editor's library, for transportation to "Sister Janes," "Aunt Sallys," and "Cousin Susans," that was subsequently found stowed away under a wood-pile? Bertha thought it was; and her olden admiration for shoulder-straps and private uniform grew "small by degrees and beautifully less."

Editor Snow was a staunch Union man from the dawn of secession, and thundered anathemas upon the leaders up to the day of dissolution; then he subsided quietly, and retired from the contest, a non-combatant during the struggle for independence on one side and subjugation on the other.

But Editor Snow suffered more at the hands of Union soldiers than the strongest secessionist, *per se*, in the city of Alexandria! And if he did not become more attached to the cause for which he originally battled, through the injustice and thievish propensities of those who had enlisted under the old flag, it was owing entirely to the perverseness of weak human nature.

The cupidity and inhumanity of Northern soldiers embittered more Southern minds against the Federal Government, than Stephens, Sumner, and Phillips had succeeded in accomplishing in their thirty years' efforts, in public harangue and private wire-pulling.

And the war was prolonged by the exasperating measures of men who were paid from the national treasury to protect the Union.

Mr. Belmont was a Northern man, and "true-blue for the Union," and Claude was a well-known loyalist; but men who were fighting *for their country* had robbed their store in darkness, and run off with their funds in daylight, before

their eyes, and escaped punishment for the unsoldierly deed.

Negroes who had escaped from their masters within the Federal lines, were knocked down and robbed, shot at, and in some instances killed, by those who professed to be their "best friends," and were fighting for their liberty.

One honest, industrious, inoffensive colored man * was robbed of one hundred dollars on the holy Sabbath day, by soldiers who were fighting *for their country*. Some held pistols to his head, while others plundered his premises. Cutting a hole in the tin lid, they emptied the poor man's hard earnings, from his private box, into their patriotic pockets; and Shoulder-straps declared himself "afraid to interfere."

"There's bravery for you!" said Bertha, when the tale was told; and Mr. Olney's face flushed as he caught the sound of sarcasm.

Innocent girls were consigned to endless infamy by the wiles and false promises of patriotic men, who spit scorn at the word "traitor." And many unsuspecting, susceptible daughters of Eve were married to brave defenders of the Nation's honor, who had wives in Northern homes.†

Bertha and Claude ranked high among the list of "Southern Loyalists" when the first Federal regiment took possession of "the favorite city of Washington;" and Percy Ormund knew her mind when the old woodman looked under his broadbrim, and said, smilingly:

"I reckon this little girl is Union at heart?"

But our heroine ere long acquired the reputation of being a "copperhead," simply because she "despised meanness," and could not indorse the unpatriotic, unjust, and inhuman

* Alonzo Butler, son of the author's servant, who was emancipated by her owners twenty years before the war.

† The incidents related in this chapter are facts known to the author.

deeds that were perpetrated daily by "loyal" men who were fighting *for their country*.

Bertha was amazed at the conduct of Northern men, who professed to be friendly to the South, and only battled against it to defend the Nation's honor. She expressed her sentiments to Mr. Olney, one day.

"You must not form your estimate of the Northern people by what you see here," he replied. "These men are not a fair specimen of the 'bone and sinew' of the North — merely the fag ends of creation!"

"I wish they'd send us a 'fair specimen,' then," returned our heroine, dryly.

"Butler, for instance," suggested the chaplain, facetiously.

"Yes, under his 'Tower,' by way of the 'canal,'" said Bertha, soberly.

"What would you do with him if he were yours by right of conquest?"

"Send him to Barnum to exhibit in New Orleans. He never made a fortune out of a greater 'humbug'!" smiled Bertha.

"I am no admirer of such extremists as Butler & Co.," replied the good man. "'A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger;' — and 'molasses will catch more flies than vinegar,'" he added, with a pleasant smile.

"If the Union soldiers possessed the spirit of President Lincoln, there would be less hardness felt towards them by the Southern people, and less reluctance to yielding to the authority of the Federal Government."

"And yet your people seceded because of his elevation."

"Yes, and they see their error now. They fell into the power of their enemies by turning against their friend. I have heard Union officers and privates abuse him for a 'traitor,' because he is generous and just!"

"Everybody nowadays is a 'traitor' and 'rebel,' who don't play into the hands of radical politicians," said the Christian conservative, with serious eyes.

"Bertha the Beauty" liked her chaplain admirer, and shrank from the necessity of rejecting the offer she knew must come.

She longed to forestall his declaration by informing him of her position, and thus spare him and herself the mortification and pain of proposing and declining. But modesty could not overstep the bounds, and no auspicious moment presented itself for her relief.

"I wonder what that chaplain is after *every* day now," said Mr. Belmont, one evening, with sober face but twinkling eyes.

Bertha blushed furiously in spite of her indifference towards the man.

"To administer spiritual consolation, I presume," returned Claude, resting his nose in the fork of two fingers, and staring hard at the hot grate.

"Can't you tell?" asked the old man, looking over his glasses at Bertha, with a remarkably innocent face.

"No, sir; he hasn't informed me."

"Sensible man that — don't dose his patient till he's sure of the state of the pulse," returned Mr. Belmont, scratching his head.

"I wish he was sure then. I don't want his medicine."

"Don't know but you'd better take the loyal man, and leave the Rebel, after all," said the old father, soberly.

"*Me?* I would n't marry another Yankee to save the world and Long Island!" replied our heroine, impulsively.

Mrs. Belmont rocked back and laughed musically; and Claude took his nose from between his fingers and whistled.

"Hum! a saucebox, the best way we can turn you," grunted the Yankee father, — "what's the matter now, impudence?"

"I don't think it advisable for the two sections to intermarry. They are too unlike in every respect, and never can coalesce — always a house divided against itself, I don't care where you find them; like ours — two against two!" laughed Bertha.

"But the most sensible are always on the right side — like my house, for instance," said Mr. Belmont, giving his head another dig.

"Then the most sensible ought to make a wiser choice than to marry out of their own church. I wish it was against the law."

"Then you would n't have the chaplain after you!"

"I wish I could get rid of him without hurting his sensibility. I respect and esteem the man; but I would refuse him for his Northern origin, if there were no other reason. I know too well the uncongeniality of Northern and Southern minds. I don't mean to be 'impudent,' pa. You know how I love you; and you know, too, I'm telling the plain truth without any disparagement."

"I'll warn the preacher against you then. You shan't have the honor of refusing another Yankee, by George!"

"I wish you would! I wish you would! I'd give anything to avoid it! It is n't pleasant," said Bertha, clapping her hands in glee at the prospect of escape.

"Think I can manage it better. Leave it to me," chimed in Claude, who was satisfied of her sincerity. "I can get you out without hurting him, by hinting at your situation."

"That's a good fellow! You've got *some* Southern blood in you," laughed Bertha, looking over at her good-natured father, deprecatingly. "But no exposure of names, mind you."

"I'll manage it, I bet — trust me," said Claude, smoothing his moustache up, and stopping his nose with the ends.

When Mr. Olney called next day, Claude Belmont was

playing truant from his law-office, and "dropped in" to see the chaplain.

"All quiet along the lines to-day?" inquired Claude, glancing at Bertha.

"Not altogether — some fighting at the front. I think the 'tug of war' has come at last, and the 'on to Richmond' will soon end."

Bertha grew suddenly white.

"Take care!" said Claude, looking straight at his sister; "that touches where it's tender."

"Anything staked upon the result?" asked the chaplain, changing countenance rapidly, as he marked the change in Bertha.

"Everything upon one life! No damage done yet, I suppose?"

"Only one noted Rebel killed, as reported; and that is as encouraging to the Federals as the death of Stonewall."

"Who is that?" and Claude's face betrayed his anxiety.

"Colonel Ormund the Brave — he —"

Bertha sprang up with a scream that lifted the hearers to their feet, and with a moaning gasp fainted in the arms of her brother. It was the first time in her life of trial that our heroine had lost consciousness through sudden excitement and soul-pain, and Claude was terrified by her death-like seeming.

Bertha had warned Claude against exposing names, but the name had exposed her.

Mr. Olney knew "Colonel Ormund the Brave," who had given her remorseful husband his death-blow, was dearer to our heroine than Horace Stanhope was when they laid him in the soldiers' cemetery — dearer than *he* could ever become, he feared, when he looked in that long insensible face, and saw no sign of returning life.

But the good man left her restored to reason, and sobbing

in anguish with the pain *he* had unintentionally given her, thinking, perhaps, it was God's purpose to favor his hopes, by removing from between them the two barriers to their realization.

Claude Belmont was half crazed by his sister's deep distress; still he exerted himself to comfort her by feigning unbelief in the report of Percy's death. "No rumor was reliable in war-times," he said, cheerfully, "and the old boy would, undoubtedly, walk in at no distant day, and astonish the natives. He did n't believe in snapping up every report, and taking it for granted, when every wish was but father to the thought. Colonel Moseby had been killed several times during the war, and was alive, playing the mischief yet! So with Stonewall, McCullough, and all those who were most feared by the enemy. He did n't believe God had brought things out so favorably for her and Percy thus far, to disappoint her at last."

Bertha caught at this suggestion with all the eagerness that drowning hands grasp at straws, and felt a little comfort in the thought; but when weeks went by, and no word from Percy came, and the papers teemed with his death, and the manner in which "the bold Rebel met his fate for treason," she fell away into utter hopelessness of a reunion in this world, with him who was the life of her life, and who had tenderly counselled her to let not her faith in Him, who "doeth all things well," be shaken, if he should fall.

She said, to the secretly distressed Claude, in utter dependency:

"I told you so at Horace's grave. I had a presentiment then, that I should suffer, through Percy, to atone for the past."

"I don't believe it yet," said Claude, trying to look bright. "It is written, 'Put thy trust in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desire of thy heart.' Now, if Percy has fallen,

it will falsify this assertion; and not 'one jot or tittle of His word shall fall to the ground, till all be fulfilled.'"

"I know that; God is true, and if it fails, *I* have been faithless. I have not trusted, wholly; and loved the creature more than the Creator — that is my fear!" she added, with a crimson flush rippling over her white face at the confession.

"Besides," she continued, "it was foretold me in childhood, that I should never marry but once; and the predictions of the seer respecting my matrimonial life were so truthful, that it has impressed me with a belief in the whole. The superstition has followed me for years!"

"Poh! what did the fellow say of your destined lord?"

"That he would 'come from afar' — be 'very handsome' — would 'love me to death,' and 'be much of a dog'!"

"He hit the nail there, by George! But what has *happened* to come true in the past don't prove anything for the future. The old fellow could n't see through Horace's shadow to Percy's sunshine."

"Yes; I was trying for Percy, then. It was while he boarded with us."

"Oh, ho! you were? What did the old humbug say of the boy?"

"He described him perfectly — said he was 'a noble fellow' — that he 'loved me,' but I would 'never marry him' — why, he could not tell — he was 'lost in a fog,' and could n't 'see clear' — but he 'never saw so many crosses in one hand as I had in mine'!"

"Humph! Well, I don't believe the old pretender foresaw it, if it all comes true. The Lord don't give such wisdom to mortals in this day and generation of vipers! and I hope you won't suffer your mind to be affected by the old impostor's guess-work. I'd like to pound him for his pretensions to omniscience, by George! I see now what you

were moping about, after Horace died. You thought because he 'loved you to death,' the rest was bound to come true!"

"And it has!" said Bertha, striving to appear calm.

"Nothing like it, sir!" returned Claude, recalling, by the language, an association that made our heroine smile irresistibly. "The end is not yet, unless it is the end of *night*. I can see the daylight through the dark, in spite of the old rascal's prediction. Such fellows ought to share the fate of the witches in Saul's day, 'I swan!' Anyhow, don't give up the ship, and break your heart over the wreck, until you *know* it has gone down, and see the splinters on the shore! Many a sail has got safely into port after being lost for years; and I don't believe God designs this one to go down in deep waters just yet," said the loving brother, with assumed cheerfulness.

Claude Belmont felt less hope for Percy's life than he affected to feel. He had seen more published accounts of his death, in defending the "Rebel capital," than Bertha was permitted to read; but he felt justifiable in the well-meant deception, for the sake of her life and his home.

Our heroine was idolized by her parents and brother, and Claude thought by familiarizing her mind with the contemplation of her lover's death, while cherishing a hope of his life, would stretch her power of endurance gradually, and not snap the cord by a sudden wrench, when the full conviction of his loss was felt.

Bertha tried hard to submit patiently to the decree of heaven, and bear up bravely under this greatest cross of her life, for the sake of "the loved ones at home"; but her health failed in the black shadow that fell over the sunshine of her life; and Claude's gay tone and hopeful smile died quite away in heart-ache, when the physician said there was but little hope of his patient's recovery.

CHAPTER LIX.

LAST SCENE IN BERKSHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS.

THE last scene in the dilapidated frame house, in Berkshire, Massachusetts, is in the latter part of October, 1864.

It was a cold but sunbright day, and nature looked barren and bleak in the lonely hollow, shut in by gloomy granite mountains.

The sweetest month, in the South, looked grim and grieving in the frosty air of the rock-bound North — all wrinkled and worn out as December in our heroine's early home.

The old house was unchanged, excepting a darker shade from the soiling hands of the passing years; but the inmates had grown old, and hard, and dried up, with daily toil.

"Newt" was married and gone, and "little Mat," of fourteen years ago, was a young woman of eighteen, with a seeming of ten years more.

But there was a baby yet, with regular rounds between it and the baby of fourteen years ago, besides twins between the two.

Silas had a houseful that day, for "Uncle Enos" and "Gid" had driven over to look at a new mowing-machine "'Lonzo" had sent up from "New Yorick," as a present to his hard-working brother; and "'Lonzo," Allyn, and Hannah "popped in," before they had finished inspecting and admiring the "labor-saving git-up."

"Uncle Enos" and "Gid" accepted an invitation to remain to tea, in honor of the city folks' arrival.

Gid was married, but his "wife would n't take on 'bout it, 'cause she knowed where he was," Silas said.

"'Pears like yeou don't look bright as a new pin," said Uncle Enos, slapping Alonzo on the knee to wake him up.

"Then my looks don't deceive you; I have sad news of Horace."

"Hey? has Horace turned up at larst? Ben a good many years since he let a body know where tew find him. Where's the dog?"

"In his grave!"

A sudden silence reigned. Martha was the first to break it.

"Yeou don't say so, 'Lonzo! be yeou certain?"

"Certain! Bertha saw him die."

"Bertha!" ejaculated Martha.

"I swan!" said Silas, wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

"Dew tell a body straight eout, and don't pinch it off so," requested impatient Martha.

At Horace Stanhope's earnest desire, Bertha had written his full confession, together with her reasons for remaining unmarried, to be transmitted to Alonzo, if he should not recover, and appended his own signature to the letter, with the request that it should be communicated to his friends. He could not die calmly, without making this atonement for the past. Bertha added a postscript, after his death, and fulfilled her dead husband's last desire.

Alonzo read the letter, with many a pause and choking down of emotion.

The men set their teeth hard, and bore it bravely, with only an occasional dash of the hand across the eyes; but the women broke down and cried as only women can.

If God had not given woman the blessing of weeping away her woes, the world would be full of broken hearts. Tears are the safety-valve to softer and more sympathizing souls than self-controlling men possess. Woman is a weaker foundation, but a stronger shelter than man.

"Pure fellow!" said Uncle Enos, with solemn eyes. "I be glad he repented and died right."

"And I thank the Lord, Bertha found him before he died," returned Alonzo, "for he loved her enough to have been a better man."

"I swan if he did n't!" said Silas.

"The Lord led him in a way that he knew not; and if he had n't found her, he would 'a' gone tew the pit;" and Deacon Enos groaned.

"New reason for not marryin' agin, seems tew me," said unregenerate Gid. "I don't see no use in livin' single, when the law's on my side. I'd 'a' done it if I'd ben in her shoes, you may bet high, and win every time!"

"The child's right," replied the Deacon, with snapping eyes; "this divorce law is a mean business, and a dangerous one, tew, I tell yeou! If the law was agin marryin' after bein' divorced, there would n't be so many separations of man and wife, sure's a gun. A man takes a wife, and swears to stick tew'er as long as they tew shall live, and if he's a mean scamp, and takes a hankerin' after a new face, he'll kick up a muss, and git a divorce, and marry agin. It's agin the scriptur, anyhow, and no rale Christian will dew it."

"It's nothing more nor less than prostitution, when you look at it right, if human law does recognize it," said Alonzo; "and the law is a curse to the world. If a first marriage proves unfortunate, and the divorced parties marry again, the second union is as unhappy as the first, observe it when you will; and public censure naturally falls upon the one who has been separated from a former husband or wife, whether they merit it or not. It seems to be a fatality that invariably follows the violation of a marriage vow. There's Mima Roseby, whose first husband ran away from her, and after a divorce her second followed suit; and —"

"And her third'll dew that same, sure fire, if she gits

him!" interrupted Gid, knocking his fists together, by way of emphasis. "Dang my eyes, if I'd live with her a week, if there was a divorce law in the land! She's worse'n half a dozen cats under a kitchen after dark — by jing!"

"And but for the law of divorce, she never would have married but once, if her first husband had died when he deserted her, in all probability; but Roseby, relying upon legality, in defiance of her reputation as a shrew, tried the experiment of taming her, and found his strength inadequate to the effort. Now he'll have the Gordian knot cut, and marry again, probably; and his second wife will run off from him, just as like as not, as a punishment for his sin — and so it goes," said Alonzo, seriously.

"I'm not surprised at some separations," spoke up Allyn; "for it's an impossibility to live with some people without sending one's soul to perdition; but and if they depart, let them remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to their husband or wife. And you may take it for granted, the one that marries first, after such a separation, is the guilty party, in the first instance; for a man or woman who has a wicked husband or wife, is never in haste to enter into a second union after their death. They get enough of matrimony to last them some years; and a burnt child dreads the fire! But where they are happily wedded, and death divides, they'll marry again soon, if they get a chance."

"Cousin Bertha ben't single 'cause *she* could n't git a chance, you may bet high!" responded admiring Gid. "Dang my eyes, if she wer'n't the pootiest pictur that my peepers ever lit on, by jing! And Horace was jealous as a Chineese 'cause I said so, pure boy! He could n't help it, I guess; and if he had n't been so green-eyed he'd ben a-livin' now, and happy as a fellow ought tew be this side o' Jordan; for Cousin Bert was a rale good little thing, and took his crossness easier than I thought she ought tew a done. I'm

glad he owned up tew 'er 'fore he went; 'cause it 'll be a comfort tew 'er tew know she did n't live single for no good." And happily married Gid looked truly sympathizing, as he thought of our heroine's unfortunate state of celibacy.

"Bert'a was a beauty, that's so!" exclaimed the Deacon, enthusiastically; "and I give Horace a good long warnin' agin his greenness, one day, and showed him his luck in gittin' such a sweet little wife, and how he ought tew try tew be grateful tew God, and make her happy, 'specially now she was away from home; but it did n't dew a mite o' good. 'T was bred in the bone, and could n't come out o' the flesh, and he suffered for his sins, pure fellow!"

"And they were scarlet!" sighed Alonzo.

"Yes, but the Lord made them white as snow," said good Martha.

"That's the only comfort now," returned Alonzo, who loved his brother despite his crimes.

"Death-bed repentance is a doubtful hope; but there are rare instances of such conversions, as in the case of the thief on the cross. But for that, I should doubt the possibility of being accepted by the Lord then, after a whole life had been given to the devil."

"The old fellow got cheated that time," said Gid, whose merry heart could not long remain depressed. "I'm going tew give him fair warnin' not to wait for me, so's not tew be disappointed at larst!"

"You 'll have tew turn over a new leaf then, and git up early tew fool him!" replied the Deacon, rubbing his mouth to shade an incipient smile.

CHAPTER LX.

A SPEEDY REACTION.—THE LOST IS FOUND.

IT was late in May, and all nature was smiling without, through sunshine and blue skies, green leaves and fragrant blossoms; but Claude Belmont sat within, beside his slumbering sister—beautiful even in deathlike whiteness and wanness—and the loveliness of nature was lost to the weeping-hearted brother.

The solemn-faced physician said Bertha must die, without a speedy reaction of the mind; and Mr. Belmont's home was darkened by the brooding wings of the last enemy of mankind; for all hope of Percy Ormund's return to claim his bride was extinguished.

The war was ended. Richmond had fallen. General Lee had surrendered; his army had been paroled, and Percy was silent. Had he been living, they would have been apprised of the fact through some source, for Colonel Ormund was indefatigable.

Claude was watching his sleeping sister, and wondering at the ways of Providence. Claude's heart was hardening in the winter of her strange fate. He wondered why God had left her to die of silent sorrow, when he had promised a different end to those who trusted in His word. He could not believe such suffering necessary to bring her—so good and pure in heart and life—to a land of rest, across the waves of Time.

Claude's heart rebelled against the decree of Heaven, and his face looked hard as he felt.

He tried to evoke a softer spirit, by thinking the afflic-

tion was for some wise purpose beyond his finite views ; but the iron would not melt — the heat of feeling was too low in the furnace of desire.

The door-bell sounded, but did not rouse him from dark dreams.

"Gentleman wants you, Mister Claude." And the servant disappeared.

Claude went down the stairs, slowly and solemnly ; but his countenance changed like leaping light through a dense cloud, when his sunless eyes fell upon the "gentleman," for "Colonel Ormund the Brave," bearing evidence of long confinement, stood before him.

Claude Belmont bounded forward and caught Percy around the neck, with a glad outflow of tears that did not shame his manhood. Bertha would live now, he thought, for a "speedy reaction" would follow her lover's return.

The phase of nature was changed in a moment for happy-hearted Claude. He fell down on the sofa and laughed, and clapped his hands like a new convert.

"Hallelujah !" shouted Claude, softly. "I'll never doubt the Lord again, I *think* ! Dog if I was n't growing fearfully hard under the pressure ! — makes me feel guilty of treason ; but I'll take the oath of allegiance now !" looking significantly at the late Rebel in arms.

Colonel Ormund's thin face lost its whiteness and gloom before the brother's rejoicings, but he went slowly and painfully up the stairs to Bertha's chamber. His wound was yet unhealed. Percy touched lightly the pale, grieving mouth of the slumberer with his own, and left a tear upon her white cheek.

She seemed to feel his presence even in sleep, for a soft smile broke over her tingling cheek and settled around her lips ; and when she awoke, "Bertha the Beauty" was in

the arms of him she had thought never to meet again on earth — “Colonel Ormund the Brave!”

Colonel Ormund was wounded by a sharpshooter while defending the weakest point around the Confederate capital, and the event, perhaps, saved his life in subsequent attacks more violent and sanguinary.

“There goes a stronghold!” cried the officer who watched the result through a glass from the point of observation,— “‘Colonel Ormund the Brave’ is down! Three cheers for the Union!”

The men sent up a shout, and “Colonel Ormund the Brave is killed!” ran along the lines as an encouragement to the troops, and was brought up to Alexandria with rejoicings.

Percy was borne off insensible, and the weak point became weaker, and ere long the United States flag waved over it. The “shepherd was smitten, and the sheep were scattered!”

“Colonel Ormund the Brave” was carried by Walter Eldon without the city limits, to the quiet home of Agnes Bentley of former years (now Mrs. Leroy), and tenderly nursed by that sympathizing friend, for his own sake as well as for Walter’s kindness in other years. Her husband was a surgeon in the Southern army, and Percy was well attended.

His wound was in the head — not considered mortal, but such as to cloud his intellect; and only partial recognition of friends and passing events was perceptible to the faithful watchers for many long days; and the war with the South had culminated in the assassination of President Lincoln by one who had no Southern blood in his veins, ere Percy awoke to the full consciousness of his situation, and the overthrow of the Confederacy.

Then his thoughts went after Bertha, and he wondered if she had heard of his fall. Walter wrote thrice, but

no answer came to relieve the lover's anxiety, and Percy could not be held longer in Dr. Leroy's home. God raised him up in time to save our heroine from a premature grave, and Claude from unbelief!

"Colonel Ormund the Brave" and "Bertha the Beauty" were made "one flesh" before the golden sun that gilded that sweet May day went down the purple pathway of the west, and the dream of twenty years ago was realized at last!

Percy insisted upon an immediate marriage. He said "they had waited long enough, in his opinion, and there was no necessity for a longer delay. He wanted a legal right to watch with her during her further illness, and not send up his card with his compliments until she was fully restored."

Bertha's cheeks crimsoned, and she shut her eyes tight, as he bent over to look into their shining brown depths.

"I say, Mrs. Colonel Percy Ormund," said gay Claude, when the marriage ceremony was over, and her husband's glad bosom pillowed her happy head, "where's your old humbug now — hey?"

Percy looked inquiringly at his buoyant brother-in-law, and Claude related the whole story, with laughable illustrations of her woe-begone appearance, under the influence of the old impostor's prognostications.

The smiling bridegroom turned up his nose at her in affected disdain, and then dipped down and stopped her mouth with his own.

"It ought to be punishable by law for human beings to arrogate the wisdom that belongs only unto God," said Percy. "I care not how strong a mind may be, such predictions are poison that gets into the bones, and makes itself felt under some circumstances — such as my little wife was subjugated by!" and Percy Ormund's spiritual eyes smiled

down into hers with a tender light that repaid our fair heroine for all her past sufferings.

"But she might have been Mrs. *General* Ormund, if I had not refused the honor for a reason," continued Percy, opening his eyes at her playfully, with a most innocent expression.

"What the mischief did you do it for?" queried Claude, with face full of wonder.

"After the battle at Winchester I said, if it was God's will that Horace Stanhope should die by my hand as Colonel, I would never exchange the title for one of a higher rank; and I never will!" said Percy, in a tone and with a face that left no doubt of his determination.

"Well, that beats me!" exclaimed Claude, caressing his moustache, and looking at the Colonel and his bride, with eyes brimming with satisfaction.

"I'm glad you did," said Bertha, softly.

"Why, dear?" and Percy bent over the soft mouth with tender fondness.

"Because I met you first, after many years, bearing that title; and I shall always love it best, now — it seems a part of you," smiled Bertha, significantly.

"Yes, by George!" and Claude started up with renewed animation. "Colonel and old Broadbrim are one and inseparable, 'you know!' I said she'd feel better when Percy came in with another load!" and gay Claude turned on his heel and went out of the chamber, with shoulders humped, and holding his nose ridiculously, to Percy's great amusement.

The old French surgeon was called in to examine Percy's wound, and set their minds at rest by saying, in his jovial way:

"No dangair, *madame*. Get well *certainement*, *mon amie*. Keep cool, *monsieur* — a-h!"

"Bertha the Beauty" recovered rapidly after the "mental reaction," and introduced her husband to the chaplain, not long after their happy marriage, as "Colonel Ormund the Brave."

Mr. Olney's smile was sad when he offered his congratulations to the happy pair, but he bore his disappointment bravely, and soon left their vicinity for a more southern field of action.

Colonel Ormund and wife went North during the summer, to their subsequent regret, as it furnished them with proofs of Yankee bitterness and yearning for Southern blood, that was highly displeasing to Christian minds. Men who had not shouldered a gun in defence of the Union, and did all their fighting with their tongues, were not satisfied that the war should end until the South was utterly crushed by confiscation and Northern emigration, and every Rebel of rank had dangled at the end of a rope! It was an entirely different religion from their own and President Johnson's generous, manly spirit, that hung out its sign in New England; and our hero and heroine stood aghast at the strange sight!

One, bearing the sacred title of *Reverend*, said to Bertha, whose brown eyes flashed indignant scorn in his would-be insulting face:

"Virginia has got to have her nose put to the grindstone, and then pay for the turning!" *

Bertha subsequently remarked to the amused Percy, with a spice of vindictiveness irrepressibly evoked:

"If that patriotic preacher had *his* nose put to the grindstone, he could get it turned for him, in Virginia, *without pay!*"

Percy's head fell back against the chair, and his blue eyes laughed away her wrath, as he replied cheerfully:

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

* Facts, for which the author is responsible.

These men think they are the Government, but the Government don't recognize them. My trust is in the Lord and Andrew Johnson!"

Our Colonel and wife returned to Virginia before the summer was ended, owing to the offensiveness of the spiritual atmosphere, firmly resolved never to be submerged in such an uncongenial element again.

"Colonel Ormund the Brave," and "Bertha the Beauty," his God-given wife, were henceforth "content to breathe their native air on their own ground."

CHAPTER LXI.

MR. REDMOND "LETS THE CAT OUT."—HOME SWEET HOME, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME.

IT was September, in Edalia's home. Walter had gone to Tarboro', and Edalia and Minnie were impatiently awaiting his return.

Tarboro' was the nearest post-office to their home; one had not yet been established at Williamsville, and the friends hoped to hear from Bertha on Walter's return. They had not received a line from her in five years.

Walter had informed them of her engagement to Percy Ormund, at the close of the war. Mr. Redmond sprang from his chair, rubbing his hands furiously, with flashing eyes.

"Ha! ha! ha! Good! I thought so, by Jupiter!"

"You thought what?" queried Minnie, with a drawl.

"I thought the Lord would bring it out right. They've loved each other twenty years! I saw it when he boarded

with Belmont; but *he* did n't, the blind bat! I wish I'd managed it for 'em, by Jupiter! but I was n't quite sure; she was such a shy thing. If Belmont had taken him back when he requested it, 't would a saved her a world of suffering — poor child! But I reckon it's all right; the Lord knows what's best for us."

"Well, well! and I never dreamed it, with all my keenness!" laughed Minnie. "But no wonder, for she would n't ever talk about him, and seemed as cool as November towards him, at that."

"The very best proof of her warmth, by Jupiter! Girls who show fair don't feel so much, after all — their love is only on the surface; but still waters run deep. 'Bertha the Beauty' was n't one to show a great deal, but the very mischief to hide, by Jupiter! I tried to draw her out one day, when Percy was gone, but she first glowed like a red-hot ember, and then froze as hard as mid-winter. I let her alone after that, but I kept a deuce of a thinking. And the belief followed me, until conviction came, with the confession that Ed said Bertha had made just before her marriage, without betraying the name of the object.

"Well, Percy is a lucky fellow, and he deserves it for his twenty years' constancy. I reckon she looks beautiful *now*, if she is thirty-four. She'll be handsome at sixty, I'll bet two chincapins, by Jupiter!" and Mr. Redmond dropped down upon his chair, and stretched himself out at full length, with a grunt of intense satisfaction.

Mr. Redmond's home presented a more cheerful aspect now than when we last visited it, although most of its valuables had gone North to furnish soldiers' homes. But Edalia's smiles had returned with Walter safe from the war, and Minnie was merry as old, since Charles was wholly restored. "Father Eldon," "Uncle Ned," and the children rested from daily apprehensions of a gunboat at "Redmond's

Landing," and some of their best and most intelligent former slaves had returned, and settled down in their cabins around the "great house," glad to find themselves among their old friends once more, after their experience among strangers.

Dick was one of the number, and cheered his old master more than all the rest of returning prodigals, for Dick was Mr. Redmond's "brag boy" from babyhood. Dick was black as the ace of spades, and his white eyes and teeth rendered him truly interesting as a portrait. He played the banjo and danced to his own music, and was never afflicted with the blues.

Aunt Cora and Di were Dick's mother and sister; and the old lady shouted in real Methodist style when her truant boy came "home from the war."

Peter Simpkins was returning home from Williamsville, after General Lee's surrender, when his eyes fell upon Dick, trudging along the highway, somewhat in advance. Peter was glad.

"Hello! Dick, is that you, boy?"

Dick turned as though he had been shot.

"Yes, sah; dis is me, sartin shore. How d'ye *do*, Mars Pete?" said Dick, shaking Peter's left hand till his arm ached with the exercise. "Dis nigger's gwine home, he is. Been 'way long 'nuff. Got 'nuff o' strangers an' de Norf, he is, sartin shore! Ding if I ain't glad I'se mose dare now. Mose froze las' winter, dis nigger did, sartin shore! Mose broke his heart longin' for de warm corner in de kitchen at ole marster's! Yes, sah; dis nigger's gwine home, *he* is, sartin shore, Mars Pete." *

Peter took Dick up in his gig, and put him down at Mr. Redmond's gate.

"Squire, I've brought your boy back, free of charge.

* A truth well attested.

First time you 've had a foreign visitor, in some years, without paying dear for it!" laughed Peter, as he drove on.

When Dick was fairly settled in his old home again, he lay down on the piazza-floor and rolled with delight, with little Ed and Charlie tumbling over him, in high glee.

"Gosh!" said Dick, laughing and crying, "ef I ain't got 'nuff o' some folks, an trav'lin', I would n't say so, sartin shore!—dat's me, marster."

"Well, Dick," returned Mr. Redmond, smiling with satisfaction, "there's nothing like trying, and I'm glad you know now, from experience, who are your 'best friends.'"

"Dat's de trufe, sah. I nose 'em. Can't fool dis nigger no more, sartin shore! Ain't like our folks, sah. Pays you all in perliteness, an' dat's what we niggers can't live on in war times,—dat's me! Dey ax me what my name is, an' I say 'Dick Redmond.' Den dey say: 'Mr. Redmond, please to black my boots;' an' when I done do it dey say: 'Well, Mr. Redmond, I s'pose I must pay you ten cent?' and I gits it, but sometimes it won't pass no furdur,—done gone and give me counterfeit, sah, sartin shore! Den Southern gen'leman come 'long an' ax me my name, an' I say 'Redmond,' 'cause t'other one say 'Mister.' Den Southern gen'leman ax me if dat's all de name I got, an' I say 'Dick, sah.' Den he say: 'Here, Dick, you rascal, black my boots.' An' he ax me how I gits on, an' I say, 'Poorly; wish I was back wid ole marster; an' I's gwine, too, sartin shore!' Den when I done 'black 'em up, an' make 'em shine, like dandy Jim o' Caroline,' he say: 'Here, Dick, is a dollar for you; now don't go drink it up, you black scamp!' An' I say, 'No, sah, sartin shore!' wid a heart full o' glad, sah. Oh, I tell you, I likes Southern folks heap de most, sah,—dat's me!" said Dick, with a broad grin.

"Well, Dick, I'm glad you're back again, and satisfied

with your experience among Yankees. I'll do the best I can for you, boy; but I'm a poor man for the present, Dick. Lost all my property that could be carried down the river, and some that could n't. They burnt all my boats, and left me without one to cross the Roanoke in."

"Lordy massy, marster!" said Dick, with white eyes rolling.

"Yes, Dick, they piled 'em up, and set fire to the heap, and then left the Landing. Jared (the boatman) extinguished the flames when he fancied himself secure from observation; but pretty soon the gunboat was observed steaming back again.

"'D—— your Rebel soul!' shouted the officer in command; 'I'll blow your infernal brains eout if yeou don't put them things together agin, and set 'em a-fire, yeou secesh devil!'

"And Jared, poor fellow! was forced to obey, with a pistol pointed at his head, and see the work of his hands reduced to ashes, just because it was the property of a Southerner, and would be of some service to him, though no damage to the Federal Government." *

Dick shut his eyes and heaved a groaning sigh, with an irritable kick of one foot against the piazza rail.

"Well, sah, dat's de way dey done do everywhar I been wid 'em, sartin shore! Up dare at Elexandry, sah, dey done clean our Southern folks out, and pianners and sich did n't stand no chance. They tote 'em through de dark, and hide 'em 'way till dey could git a chance ter send 'em up Norf. I seed it, sah, and it make me bile, sartin shore! Out dare at de Fairfax Seminary, whar dey used to make preachers 'fore de war, one woman, from New Jarsey, who was nussin' de Yankeys 'cause she was so good, done stole *every* thing,

* A fact known to the author.

sah, she could lay her hands on, and sent it up home, sartin shore! *

"I reckon, sah, dey 'll have some big auctions up Norf 'fore long, 'less dey did n't have nuthin in dare houses 'fore de war, and needs what dey stole from our folks!" said indignant Dick, looking up at Mr. Redmond with a scowl.

"Well, Dick, I'm grateful for what I've got left, that could n't be burned, nor carried down the river. I reckon we 'll get along and make enough to live on; and the Lord will reward the evil-doers. You're free now, Dick, and I'm not your master any longer; but I shall not care any the less for your welfare. I shall need hands to work my plantation and low grounds, as in other years, and I'd rather hire my old servants than strangers. We 'll stick together, and help each other, won't we, Dick?"

"Dat's de trufe, sah! I ain't gwine 'way from ye no more, marster, sartin shore! Got 'nuff of 'em, I is — ain't like our folks — no *sah*! Dey don't keer nuthin fur niggers when dey gits 'em 'way from dare homes — I knows 'em good! Oh! I tell you, sah, I likes our Southern folks *heap* de mose — dat's me!" and Dick gave a congratulatory roll and chuckle for being safe at home again.

As the evening wore away, Walter Eldon was observed, through the twilight, galloping down the broad, white road. He took his hat off, and flourished it around his head, when he caught sight of Edalia and Minnie, watching for his coming. They were at the gate in a twinkling.

"Good news!" cried Walter, holding up a letter. "'Colonel Ormund the Brave' and 'Bertha the Beauty' were married last May, and will be here in two weeks (*Deo volente*) to see the old friends and scenes. Hurrah for the Union!" shouted Walter, tossing the letter over the gate, with his face all aglow.

* True incidents of the war that can be proven.

"I say so, too, by Jupiter!" sang out Mr. Redmond, rubbing his hands with exultation, as he stood upon the piazza-steps. "I said some folks would swim ashore from the foundered ship, and I reckon the Colonel and his wife won't grieve much over its loss; for the war brought *them* together for all time."

"Then you meant them, when you said it nine months ago?" queried Minnie, with wide eyes.

"Blest if I did n't!" returned the old man, with snapping orbs.

"Oh, lordy, honey!" exclaimed Aunt Cora, half crying over the good news. "I thought I'd never see Miss Bert agin in dis worl, chile; but I reckon I will now, honey. I ain't been so glad sense you was married, and Dick come back; dat's de blessed trufe, chile!"

And the faithful old Christian caught up her short-stem pipe, and filled the kitchen with a fog, in her glad excitement.

Two weeks later, Colonel Ormund and wife sat at Mr. Redmond's tea-table, refreshing themselves after their journey with Aunt Cora's excellent supper, in honor of their arrival.

"Don't look, now, as though you'd lost something and could n't find it!" said Mr. Redmond, gazing admiringly at our heroine's radiant face, with a significant smile.

"No, sir; I found it last May, after looking for it in vain twenty long years," responded Bertha, raising her bright brown eyes to Percy's loving glance.

"And Uncle Ned suspected you then, and never let the cat out till after the war!" said Minnie, with a pout. "If I'd had a hint of the truth, I would have managed it for you twenty years ago, I'll warrant!" she added, with an intelligent shake of her wise little head.

"Should n't wonder if news could fix it; for 'twould 'a' gone

from Dan to Beersheba in a day, by Jupiter!" laughed Mr. Redmond, gulping down his third cup of hot coffee.

"Don't go back to Virginia!" pleaded Edalia; "we've been separated long enough. Settle down in the 'Old North State, God bless her'!"

"That is our purpose," said Percy, looking very much pleased. "Father Belmont has authorized me to repurchase the place where his children were born; and as you are soon to have a railroad from Williamsville to Tarboro', it will bring us together in an hour's ride."

Glad cries and clapping of hands went up from the listeners.

"Mother Belmont," continued Percy, smiling down upon Bertha, "is homesick, and Claude thinks there's no place like Carolina. My wife has no preference for a foreign population (putting one finger on his lip, significantly), and I favor the move," added Percy, with sparkling eyes.

"Good! by Jupiter! blest if it ain't! Three cheers for the Union!" cried Uncle Ned, laying himself back with a merry laugh that was echoed by all parties, including Aunt Cora and Di; and Dick lay down in his "warm corner" and rolled, when the news was carried out.

Dora was early at Mr. Redmond's next day, and Colonel Wilmer and Peter came in before the close, with Dr. Montrose and family, making a happy reunion of friends of long gone years.

They all went over to the old homestead that eve, where, twenty years ago, our hero and heroine had first met in life's sunny morn; and here we now leave them, in the low brown house with the long piazza.

THE END.









